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# PROBLEMS OF DESTINY

BY  
WILLIAM ROMAINÉ PATERSON

LONDON:  
WATTS & CO.,  
5 & 6 JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.4

*Welch Schauspiel! aber ach! ein Schauspiel nur!  
Wo fass' ich dich, unendliche Natur?"*

—FAUST.

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## PREFACE

MAN, in discovering science, in part reconstructs his environment. In return his reconstructed environment reshapes him in mind and body, arousing new hopes and stilling old fears. A culture fit for civilized man must rest on a conscious appreciation of the nature of these interactions, and must measure the objectives he sets up against the material possibilities for their fulfilment. We need knowledge and wisdom.

What is the source of this restless human urge that perpetually sets an objective just out of its reach? Is it simply the pursuit of beauty? Is it the struggle for freedom, the struggle against restraint, the effort to overthrow the control material nature exerts over us, the removal of the cords with which previous generations have bound us? For restraints have a twofold aspect. They cabin and confine us physically; we tug and strain, we try this way and that, and presently we discover what holds them in place. In due course we conquer. Are we free? Have we achieved control? No, we are merely in a wider cabin within which we are

still confined. We have enlarged our capacity for freedom. It is Science that concerns itself with these physical restraints.

Mental restraints are closely linked with the physical, but they are different in quality. They are the prison cells of our thoughts and the torture chambers of our feelings. Within their four walls we brood and suffer: we draw our lessons; we moralize; we discover how to live. We form objectives for civilized behaviour. From both these experiences man distils wisdom.

This book is not a scientific book; it is just a wise book. Therefore we are all certain to disagree with it in places; but that is as it should be, for it is a book by a human being learning by trial and error to live; learning to temper science by wisdom and wisdom by science.

H. LEVY.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE following pages were read in manuscript by Professor Gilbert Murray and Mr. W. H. Helm, to each of whom the author is gratefully indebted for valuable suggestions; but he is alone responsible for the opinions expressed.





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## CHAPTER I

### THE HIDDEN CHAOS

IN the world of living things hunger and sex are the central facts. If hunger were not satisfied sex would perish, and if sex were not satisfied there could be no creatures to be hungry. Both are explosive forces, but they are constructive as well as destructive. They cause havoc, and yet they create life. In the case of hunger the alternative is eat or die, and sometimes it is eat or be eaten. Kill or be killed. We may have to kill an animal or a plant, but we must kill something. This is the unchanging law of organic persistence, and it has converted nature into a vast system of parasitism. The parasites may have the stature of a microbe or a man, a lion or an elephant, but they are all impelled by the same instinct. Lions eat antelopes, human beings feed on oxen and sheep, elephants devour the roots which they dig up with their tusks or browse on their favourite bamboo for the same reason which drives the bacillus of diphtheria to nourish itself within the throat of its victim. Place a wolf in an enclosure with a hundred lambs

and after a few minutes not a lamb would be alive. The threat of starvation and the lust of capture have made nature a scene of universal robbery, in which the main prize is invariably life itself, whether sentient in the form of flesh and blood or insentient in the form of vegetation. And man is the most formidable robber of all, because he ransacks the animal and the vegetable world not only for food but for clothing. "Each thing's a thief," said Shakespeare. Tear down the trappings of civilization, forget its refinements, its art, its superfluous luxury, and we come face to face with hunger as the prime mover. We come face to face with violence and voracity as the agents of continuance. The voracity of locusts, for example, is infinitely less than the combined voracity of the human race, which fastens on almost every form of life as its prey. Consider the number of animals slaughtered to supply the meat markets of London alone for a single week. Look into the restaurants of every great city at meal-time, and remember that at the same moment millions of human beings sitting at millions of tables all over the world are busy consuming food which has been captured on the land or in the air or in the sea. For Nature has taught all her children that the fear of famine is the beginning of wisdom. Like Napoleon's army, every

species, including the human, marches on its stomach. The fact may be distressing to idealists, although indeed they do not appear to be greatly perturbed by it. In any case, apart from a gastric basis there could be no history, no civilization, no art, no religion, and not even the opportunity of being an idealist. It is an ugly fact, accepted with equanimity, however, by numbers of people as part of a "divine plan," since it is possible to be pious and yet a *bon viveur*. We cannot imagine a hunger strike taking place throughout nature, so that the chief paradox of creation is that lives must be destroyed in order that life may be preserved. The sea is a liquid menagerie in which fish devour fish. The atmosphere is an aerial menagerie in which birds of prey devour weaker and much smaller birds, which in their turn devour still weaker insects. Nature has thus chosen assassination of one animal by another, and of most animals by mankind, as one of her main methods of revictualling. The actual words "to revictual" mean "to renew life." The march of the human race is a hunger march.

If we glance at the great life cycle discovered and described by Lavoisier we witness a bewildering spectacle. It is this: the vegetable world draws from the air, from water, and from minerals those elements which are needed for growth. Now,

animals subsist either directly on vegetables or on other animals which have already been nourished by various kinds of plant life. Therefore the substance of which the bodies of animals are composed is in both cases ultimately derived from the air, the water, and the mineral kingdom. But animals die, and the fermentation, combustion, and putrefaction which result from the decay of their bodies give back to the air and to the mineral kingdom all the elements originally borrowed, so that the cycle becomes complete. We might add that all animals are directly or indirectly vegetarian, because the constituents of their bodies were really obtained from plants. Fauna depend on flora. Let us notice, too, that hunger is one of the central facts in the life of flora. For every plant is struggling for nourishment from the soil, and from water and the air. Every wheat germ and every rice germ, for example, are busy competing with neighbouring wheat and rice germs for food from the subsoil. One form of vegetation drives out another, and whole forests have perished. Plants which suffer from parasites are themselves parasitic. Suppose, however, that all vegetation died, that grass ceased to grow, and that cereal crops disappeared. The herbivorous animals would be the first to succumb, and there would be no milk. Next, the carnivorous animals

like the lion and the tiger would destroy each other until the last survivor starved to death. For instance, the lion, which feeds on wild swine, antelopes, and buffaloes, all herbivorous, would find his food supply gone. Lastly, mankind, after the exhaustion of accumulated stocks, would die out in an earth which had become utterly barren. We are now in the presence of the strange and startling fact that in the world of animals the hunger struggle which involves the constant shedding of blood has really issued from the world of vegetable life in which the struggle is bloodless. No flora, no fauna. With unconscious and impersonal elements such as oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, and carbon, which enter into the composition of animals and plants alike, there was blended, we know not why or how, the mystery which we call consciousness, with all the tragic possibilities which accompany it. But new weapons were needed for a new contest, and they took the form of teeth, horns, jaws, claws, poison glands, instinct, cunning, and brains. And to the confused struggle of all living things the human confusion was added. Within the human area assassination became organized as war, which is public murder committed in order to appease the hunger of one community at the expense of another. The maelstrom of history had begun.

It cannot be pretended that man was surrounded by edifying examples. On the contrary, he was impelled by all that he saw about him as well as by all that he felt within him to become an additional factor in Nature's huge plan of plunder. His apprenticeship in savagedom long preceded his apprenticeship in morals and in Christendom, and has left unwashable stains on his civilization. Old naïve theologies used to picture him as a being who had come fresh and pure from the hands of a Creator, although he was the last to be created. It is noticeable, for instance, that in the cosmogony of the Hebrews all the other animals duly equipped for the struggle were in the field before mankind, so that the programme of attack and defence was already being enacted. Mankind were specially invited to take part in it, and to have dominion over the beasts. But it seems immoral that a being supposed to be of moral origin should be sent to such a school to become a witness and then inevitably an imitator of the misconduct of nature. For nature is a scene of murder, sadism, and incest. In order to continue to exist, the human being likewise found it necessary to crush and kill, and later his fellow creatures would form an important part of the spoil. In its most primitive aspect civilization was an attempt to create a barrier



against the more dangerous animals. It was a kind of sheep-fold to protect the human flock from the ravages of lion, tiger, panther, and wolf ranging free in a menagerie without cages. As man became disentangled from the anthropoid he found himself weaponless in comparison with his four-footed enemies, and he was compelled to resort to cunning and co-operation. We imagine that we can see him in the angry, cloudy dawn of history peering from some dark, damp cave, and sniffing like any other animal in order to make sure that a lion or a tiger had not just passed that way. He stands like a pathetic, shaggy, living point of interrogation scrutinizing a horizon of terror. Or he ventures near the border of some vast, primeval forest, perplexed as to whether it might be safe to enter in order to gather some succulent roots, when suddenly he hears the roar of the lion, and he runs back trembling to his cavern and blocks the entrance. If we take the opposed view and consider that he was a spiritual being from the beginning, never entangled with the ape at all, and that he not only came from a spiritual source but is returning to it, our surprise seems justified that he should have been compelled not merely to pass through the polluted waters of mortality but to add to their pollution. Why should he have been transferred to an arena

where the main motive was predatory in order that he might, in the effort to keep alive, increase the whole dynamic mass of injustice? The procedure seems irrational. In this book we intend to call a shark a shark, and here at the beginning we say that we find it impossible to reconcile the doings of Nature with any beneficent plan. It is useless to indulge in an insincere credo and a bogus piety. The tribal god of Israel looks across his creation and calls or is made to call it "good." But even from the standpoint of human morality and decency that scheme cannot be good which involves for commissariat purposes the murder, often by the most cruel means, of one living creature by another. We are amazed and gladdened by the surface glory of Nature, but we need to go deeper if we attempt to understand even part of her secret. The scenery is wonderful, but what a play! Moralists generally begin their investigations too high up, whereas man first presents himself to us as an animal fighting with other animals on a low level of existence. When we look into the depths of history we discover a chaos of predatory impulses. The human packs combined to hunt the animal packs, but soon they began to hunt each other, and the process culminated for a moment in the war of 1914. Mankind were so deeply impressed by the destructive forces in

nature that when, because of fear or for purposes of consolation, they invented religions and gods they immediately extended the psychology of war to the heavens. In all the mythologies the gods are at war with each other—Zeus against Kronos, Satan against Yahweh. What is even more significant, the gods were made to take sides in the human conflict, and as late as 1914 an Anglican bishop declared that the World War was "God's War," as if the Deity were the managing director of a shambles. In the asphyxiating atmosphere of modern religious hypocrisy even Christ would put on a gas mask. The wisest of Frenchmen told his contemporaries that their minds required a purge more than their bodies. He was right. There is spiritual as well as material excrement, and our intelligence is blocked by the dead refuse of tradition.

Examine the canine teeth of the lion. Their function is to seize and to hold any large animal struggling for life within jaws which are opened and closed by muscles of enormous power. Those teeth are supplemented and assisted by others specially adapted for crushing the bones of buffaloes, zebras, antelopes, and even young elephants, together with other more or less placid herbivorous animals that have no means of defence against such an enemy. Now, if power were granted to any merciful human

being to devise a similar apparatus of murder, would he accept the offer? He would turn away with horror from the suggestion. And yet many generations were taught to "look through Nature up to Nature's God." Well might Blake ask the tiger, "Did He who made the lamb make thee?" But if all the works of creation were "good" mankind should not interfere. They should not exterminate lions and tigers and sharks. The obnoxious microbes and parasites should likewise be allowed to carry on their depredations unmolested. The tsetse fly, which causes sleeping sickness, the mosquito of malaria, the mosquito of yellow fever, and the rat flea which has the bubonic plague to its credit, have, however, in a creation which seems to be indifferently good, been responsible for the death of millions of human beings and of animals, so that mankind decided to take action some thousands of years too late. Nevertheless, man unaided has been the sole agent in the attempt to cleanse nature, and, although carrying out spoliations and ravages on his own account, he transformed himself into Nature's scavenger. He finds a virus everywhere. Throughout nature morbid poison is ubiquitous. Microbes instal themselves in the body of the new-born infant, and are found some four hours after birth. The child's first contact with his mother, his first cries,

and his first efforts to breathe cause a microbic invasion whereby his body is garrisoned for the remainder of his life. There are, indeed, beneficent microbes, and without their action life could not continue. Nature reacts against the enemies which she has herself created, and, for instance, leucocytes engage in battle with trypanosomes or the microscopic parasites which cause sleeping sickness. But it is precisely this ever-recurring duel which demands an explanation from those who pretend to discover a purpose universally beneficent. On the contrary, we appear to witness only an interminable process, in which the individuals are sacrificed in order that the mere process may be prolonged. In India, in 1889, some twenty thousand human beings, together with four thousand animals, died of serpent bite. But snakes too fear their enemies, require nourishment, and enjoy the taste of blood. The truth is that in her organic as well as in her inorganic arrangements Nature is as careless of the fortunes of one species as of another, because her stores of living germs are inexhaustible. Just as the collision of stars creates a new star, the collision of species in the conflict for existence creates new species. Rival troops of lions reaching the same river bank roar defiance at each other, and engage in battle to dispute the right to drink. Rival troops of human beings

arriving on the same territory declare war on each other, and engage in battle to dispute the right to the land. Such is life.

But Nature has ruth as well as ruthlessness. In the hurly-burly of her biological forces she finds room for the art of healing as well as for the art of wounding. Her methods of reparation are as inevitable as her methods of destruction. There exist maternal love and care and sacrifice. Although she withdraws with one hand what she gives with the other, a pessimism which ignores her brighter side is as false as an optimism which ignores her darker side. The trouble is that she knows no armistice and that her contradictions are insoluble. She has her own means of convalescence, but they exist only that the struggle may continue, and she can provide no permanent rest cure. She cannot even guarantee her own duration in any particular phase, because everything is in constant transformation. There is the perturbing thought that the conflict at which we have glanced has been meaningless, and that the sun reached its frenzy of incandescence only in order to illuminate the bewildered procession of mankind and the beasts. That incandescence is, moreover, on the wane. Our earth forms part of the rolling stock of the universe, but no rolling stock can last for ever. A process of decay is taking

place throughout the entire system. The earth is like a building exposed to atmospheric corrosion, and there are signs of weakness in an apparently solid globe. Gigantic atmospheric forces play upon the earth's surface. As these lines are being written a tornado in Mexico has swept more than five thousand human beings out of existence. In the earthquake at Messina in 1908 more than seventy-seven thousand people lost their lives, and in the Japanese earthquake of 1923 the death-roll numbered hundreds of thousands. Such facts appear to prove that human life in the eye of Nature has no more importance than the life of lobsters. By means of calculations based on the emanations of radioactive substances such as uranium and thorium, on the amount of helium contained in metals, and on the rate of formation of rock-masses, modern physicists have declared that the earth may easily be two thousand million years old. And yet the central magma, the source of earthquake, is not yet cool. In the grip of volcanic action the earth's crust is like an eggshell. Now, seismic instruments record tremors of varying intensity almost every half hour, so that the volcanic element is a sign and warning of the fragile character of the entire fabric. An ordinary observer, as he looks up at the firmament, supposes that its order is unchanging, whereas

it is in continual travail and evolution. The star *Nova Persei* which appeared in 1901 was the result of sidereal collision, in which two or more stars had been destroyed, leaving their flaming debris to form a new combination. The age of stars is denoted by their colour. Iron which is submitted to a falling temperature passes from white heat through yellow, orange, and red down to black as the mass cools. In the same manner, the youngest stars are white, yellow stars like our own sun are already at a lower temperature, and red and orange-coloured stars have still farther declined until we reach dark and dead stars. Modern astronomy has discovered stars that have grown dimmer and dimmer until they became dark like the "dark companion" revolving round Algol. What do such facts mean? They mean that the material of the universe is in constant flux and change. Diameters shrink. It is true that with every shrinkage of the diameter of the sun new heat is created on an incalculable scale, but the process must have an end. And the gradual loss of heat in the sun must finally involve the loss of all life upon the earth. "The moment must arrive when the sun will grow cold," says the great Swedish astronomer Arrhenius, "and as it happened in the case of the earth, and will happen in the case of other planets at present in the gaseous stage, the



sun will be enveloped by a solid crust. . . . Life will become extinct on all its satellites.”<sup>1</sup> There will be oceans and ice in the sun, and the solar catastrophe will involve the end of our universe, and probably the “creation” of another. The mortal tumult and the clamour of millions of years will have been long silenced. This actual stage on which man has played his part will be broken up, and the scenery, like the play and the players, must vanish. For there is in every cosmos a hidden chaos, and the only changeless thing is change itself. Whatever has reached its zenith and is perfect is already wasting away.

<sup>1</sup> *L'Évolution des Mondes*, p. 161 ; Paris, 1910.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HUMAN CONFUSION

NATURE remains indifferent to all the interpretations which are put upon her. She remains heathen, and her god is Force. She has seen one religion after another pass away, and the earth is strewn with the wreckage of temples as history is strewn with the wreckage of beliefs. Idols which once brought consolation as well as terror to their worshippers are buried so deeply in the subsoil that we must dig for them. *Sic transit*. Where are the gorgeous religious processions which once filled the streets of Nineveh and the strange streets of Babylon? We might as well ask where is the smoke of the cruel and stupid sacrifices offered up on the altars of Israel and of Athens and of Rome? In perhaps less than a thousand years Christianity too, in its dogmatic aspects, will have decayed like its frescoes painted on damp walls. But Nature remains enigmatic, imperious, wanton, and overwhelming, and too fierce to be caught in the frail net of human prayers. No supplication has ever moved *her*. No religion has made any change in her ways. If she sends an

earthquake, geologists may sit to discuss it, but they can do nothing. They can only await the next one. The earth, which is the cradle as well as the tomb of the human race, has been rocked by rough hands. If we have glanced at the more violent symptoms of the fever of being it is in order to remind ourselves of the kind of surroundings in which human destiny was shaped and misshaped. The most astonishing fact of all is perhaps that, given such conditions and the awful jungle of the prehistoric struggle, a civilization, a world of more or less refinement, could have finally emerged at all. We shall transfer our attention to that world and to our chances of happiness in it. But we may find that the human scene is as crowded with paradox and surprise as the scene in nature. We are either Nature's willing or unwilling guests, and our inscrutable hostess has at least taught us two important lessons. These are the lessons of pleasure and of pain. Hedonism is the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the supreme good in life. In the psychological presentation of that doctrine certain technical errors have sometimes been made. We are not concerned with them. The undeniable fact remains that, although self-sacrifice may be witnessed every day and every hour, mankind's preponderating desire is the renewal and the continuance of pleasant

and the abolition of unpleasant experiences. In the average life feeling is almost the only reality, and all else seems a shadowy superstructure. We do not know whether the animals possess what could be properly called ideas, or whether they are able to conceive in some obscure way some "chief good" for themselves. It is by no means improbable that many of them are conscious of a "self." At any rate, they display, just like human beings, pleasurable anticipation. The horse neighs his recognition that oats are being lifted out of the bin for him, the dog barks his joy at the prospect of being taken for a walk, and the cat purrs her acknowledgment of the saucer of milk already in view or the expected caress. Nature has made hedonists of all her creatures. The vilest sentient thing, even the Shiga microbe of dysentery, is no doubt engaged in an effort to avoid pain while inflicting it.

In the case of mankind both pleasure and pain are incalculably more elaborate than in the case of the lower forms of animate existence, but the instinct of pursuit and avoidance is the same. The demand for satisfaction is universal, because the environment is always a possible scene of dissatisfaction as well as of danger. No doubt pleasure, like porcelain, should be marked "Fragile," or, like fruit and flowers, "Perishable." But in vain the

pessimist denies its real existence or explains it as merely a negation—that is to say, the absence of pain. Call it an illusion. Nevertheless, there is nothing so real as an illusion because in the realm of feeling everything is real. To every sentient creature whatever excites it is real for the moment. A very celebrated pessimist who filled the world with his lamentation used to play the flute every evening after an excellent dinner. And there is no reason why even a morose thinker should not become a “laughing philosopher,” especially where he can discover so many opportunities of laughing in his sleeve. In a world supposed to be gravid with disaster the “good” was once defined as “gladness,” and gladness does actually exist. Pascal, who continually blames us on account of our “misery and corruption,” maintains that all forms of pleasure are merely an attempt to escape from the reality of our own wretchedness. “Ils (les hommes) ont un instinct secret qui les porte à chercher le divertissement et l’occupation au dehors, qui vient du ressentiment de leurs misères continuelles.”—“They (mankind) are secretly impelled to search outside themselves for the means of recreation and the employment of their time, and this impulse has its origin in their consciousness of their own perpetual misery.” This state-

ment seems exaggerated. The instinct towards pleasure is far deeper and has biological foundations. The animals share it, and we cannot believe that they are conscious of the need of escape from an overburdened self. In its most rudimentary forms the desire for pleasure is the cry for an outlet for spare energies, and its satisfaction is Nature's lure towards a prolongation of the struggle which she has imposed upon all her offspring. Man, who has been condemned by all moralists moralizing in a vacuum, is, after all, the only being who has made an effort, however unsuccessful, to introduce some decency into the indecent scene in which he was first educated by forces beyond his control. One of the most important of his operations is precisely his attempt to transform raw pleasure into happiness and the primary cravings of the senses into instruments of well-being. This effort was frequently made in ancient Greece, and it succeeded. In his Garden the philosopher Epicurus, who was an ascetic and lived chiefly on barley and water with cheese now and again as a luxury, although he has been calumniated by those who have not really studied his doctrine, taught indeed that pleasure was the supreme good and pain the supreme evil; but he pointed out that there are pleasures and pains of the mind as well as of the body, and it was

with those that he mainly busied himself. This fact—namely, that psychic sensitiveness has been added to physical sensitiveness—is the essence of the human problem with which we propose to deal. Meantime we may say that nothing wiser has been found than the goal of Epicurus, which was a quiet mind in a healthy body; or, in the words of Gassendi, his greatest modern disciple, *tranquillitas animi et indolentia corporis*. This was the doctrine of refuge from the ills of life which was taught in the Garden of Epicurus. History knows another Garden called Gethsemane, which all well-conducted minds must respect. But there are more moral affinities between Greece and Palestine than might at first sight be supposed. Even the dogma of original sin appears in Orphism, and the problem of evil and of suffering had troubled many Greek thinkers. Stoic elements are to be found in Christian asceticism, and official Christianity did not hesitate to borrow freely the ritual of the Pagan religions which it supplanted—incense and images, altars and vestments, as well as the idea of incarnation and the practice of communion. Moreover, there is a hidden hedonism in every religion, for, if happiness is not to be found in this life, every believer hopes to find it in the next. Obviously gladness, happiness, and pleasure require cautious

definition if they are to be made the chief ends in human life, since there are so many different kinds and degrees of them. The pleasures of an ape are not those of a man, and even among mankind æsthetic refinement belongs to the few. Asceticism is the rarest choice of all. The Stoic teaching rapidly declined in Greece and in Rome, and hedonism early invaded the theory and practice of Christianity. Just as certain cardinals during the Renaissance filled their houses with specimens of Pagan art, so Pagan methods of thought and theories of conduct gradually reappeared. The doctrine of Epicurus recovered its influence until, whether we are aware of it or not, it has received almost universal acceptance. There is a Pagan streak in all of us, and we might be surprised to find in unexpected quarters the persistence of a heathen element. Modern Christians are infinitely more epicurean than Epicurus, and their luxuries would astonish that frugal Greek. In the history of symbolism there is nothing more remarkable than the deterioration in the significance of the symbols. Modern Christians do not carry the cross, far less mount it. Or rather they "mount" it in diamonds, and even an Atheist becomes willing and eager to wear it as a decoration set in brilliants. It is the spirit of worldliness that gains the victory every-



where, so that even the cross becomes a trinket. Moreover, it may be eaten in the form of hot-cross buns. It is surprising how much material comfort and how much pomp have come out of the simple teaching of the Galilean. Even the churches are made as comfortable as opera-houses, and indeed most religions have had an operatic tendency. The founder of Christianity had nowhere to lay his head, but his bishops have palaces. He wore a crown of thorns, but his chief representative now wears a tiara. Christian civilization is a coalition of hypocrisies, but the Pagan foundations remain intact.

Human society is like a great ring fence enclosing mankind from the rest of nature. Or rather it is a series of ring fences. What takes place within them? It is not the instinct towards co-operation which distinguishes mankind from the animals. Wolves hunt in packs, lions and deer form groups, and ants and bees are highly organized communities. But in the principle of exchange humanity made a discovery of genius, and it has been one of the great levers of its ascent. One man can produce one thing, another man a different thing, so that the products of labour may be bartered. Services of all kinds may likewise be exchanged, or a man may offer to do work in return for food and main-

tenance. This simple arrangement laid the foundations of human industry. Exchange of materials and of services may also take place not only within groups but between them, and in this primitive fact lay the whole future of international trade and alliances. Then, as stocks accumulated and harvests became more regular and abundant, the sense of security increased within each human agglomeration. Mankind were no longer waifs and strays on the earth, because even the most rudimentary civilization was like a storm shutter against wild nature. It was a shelter for shelterless beings. Thus the element of precariousness was steadily reduced, so that, regarded as a whole, the community might be considered to be out of danger of famine. United in their exploitation of their surroundings, and numerically weak, they probably practised some undefined form of primitive communism.

But as the groups became larger or fused with each other, until something like nationhood was reached, a momentous change took place. Actual sharing was now impracticable, and heads of families began to provide for their own households. This meant the rise of individualism, with its inevitable revelation of the profound diversity in character and intelligence among human beings. Where some

succeeded others failed. So that, although what we have called the element of precariousness had been removed so far as the community as a whole was concerned, this was not so in the case of many individuals, and these tended to become the vast majority. In the struggle for a livelihood the members of each group began to compete with one another, and the weaker, the less audacious, the less adventurous, the less intelligent, found it necessary to barter their labour to the stronger, who were the minority. Later all the less fortunate fell into slavery. We touch here the roots of origin of the entire organization of human society even in its modern form. The upward movement of the few and the stagnation of the many have remained the characteristic features of civilized life from the time of unwritten history till the present day. United at first against nature and the wild beasts, the human community tended to become disunited within its own borders. Man learned how to make and to wear a mask, and his civilization is a masked conflict. Above the original hunger struggle on the plane of nature there began a fresh struggle on the human plane, and it continues. New kinds of hunger were created, because all the benefits resulting from human contrivance and combined activity excited a desire for their

possession. The instinct of seizure remained active. The great harvest field of civilized labour became itself a battle-field, and money, passing in gain and loss from hand to hand, became the symbol of success or failure in the muffled guerilla of competition. Then, as the various agglomerations became more prolific, problems of order and government became more urgent, and there was felt the need of a central authority to put an end to "the dissolute condition of masterless men" described by Hobbes. Civilization, with its inevitable restraints and repressions, its subtle tyrannies and secret as well as flagrant injustice, and its own special diseases, had begun. Modern citizens are sheltered behind a strong national barrier. Nevertheless, within the protecting palisade of civilization they find that many of the wilder instincts which had been of use to their far ancestors in the struggle with nature are still untamed, and are ready to break out in revolution. There is not a single State in which martial law could not be proclaimed at a moment's notice. This means that echoes of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* may still be heard in the streets of modern cities, and that, like the earth itself, society still smoulders with unquenched volcanic forces. Periodic revolution is the seismic movement in history, and, as in 1914, the magma

of social chaos may burst and blaze on any provocation. For the line of historical causes is like a time-fuse leading up to the point of ignition and explosion.

We are not going to concern ourselves, however, with the mass movement of mankind, but only with the fortunes of the individual within the mass. But we must link up the individual with the causes which brought him into being. We must attempt to suggest the conditions which he finds prepared for him as the surroundings and scenery of his own particular journey. Each of us is a product not only of nature, but of the artificial world which mankind have imposed upon nature. In nature there is in reality neither "good" nor "bad." There are only forces in harmony or in antagonism. But we dramatize the situation, and call one set of forces "good" and the other set "bad," because our own interests are involved, and our judgment is therefore tinged by emotion. In both worlds what we may describe as the negative factor—that is to say, the factor of disintegration and disruption—is constantly at work. If we look closely enough, we shall find that in the human world the action of the bad forces involves something like a moral paradox. We notice, for instance, that at nightfall every householder makes sure that

his door is locked, for the robber instinct which is rife in nature and is the means of organic continuance reappears untamed in human society and necessitates the manufacture of locks and keys. Defensive precautions are visible wherever there is property, and the warning "Beware of Pickpockets" was set up almost as soon as there were pockets to pick. Watchmen, watchdogs, and alarm bells, broken glass cemented on the tops of garden walls, impregnable safes and the chain which fastens the satchel of the bank messenger to his body as he walks along a crowded pavement—these and similar arrangements, together with an elaborate police and detective Force, are proofs that a special kind of precariousness characterizes civilized existence. But this potential crime is of economic value. If all the world became honest so that theft were a thing unknown, forgotten, and incapable of reappearing, locks and keys and other defensive means would fall out of use. Evil-doing, from petty larceny to murder, maintains the whole machinery of justice; and, although the community require to pay for the repression of crime, it is a source of revenue for many of the community's members. It has given employment to the architects who designed the prisons and to the stonemasons who built them, and it keeps in com-

fort in every city and village of the world thousands of policemen and their families, and enables them to live respectable lives. Indeed, those who are directly or indirectly engaged in the prevention and the punishment of crime stand in a curious and almost bizarre relation towards it. Their position in the world depends upon its continuance. Their salaries and incomes are staked on the possible disorder of human society. The policeman who arrests the criminal, the magistrate or judge who sentences him to prison or to death, the warder and the prison chaplain must, in moments of reflection, feel grateful to those outcasts. It is owing to the fact of crime that for all such functionaries life may become full of happiness. But other aspects of the human world present us with similar incongruities. Let us consider pauperism. The truth is that poverty is the prop of civilization, and that if it disappeared society as at present established would come to an end. Poverty is, of course, a relative term. A successful merchant is poor in comparison with a multi-millionaire. The merchant's clerk is poor in comparison with his employer, a bricklayer is in still greater poverty than the clerk, and so in a descending scale. In contrast to the class which enjoys a large margin of income for purposes of leisure and luxury, we may,

however, consider the entire working class of all grades and professions as perpetually threatened by poverty unless they continue to work. It is their poverty or potential poverty which keeps the wheels of civilization rolling. The love of work is not so innate or so universal as to compel mankind to go on working if they could live in idleness tempered by recreation. If the mass of toilers in the subsoil of civilization suddenly became rich, and if the seamen, airmen, motor-men, masons, and every other worker from harvesters to weavers and cotton spinners followed suit, there would be social paralysis. The necessities of life would fail until want would drive the community to start work once more. At least as long as the modern distribution of wealth remains unchanged the economic foundations of the world must rest upon poverty.

Let us now turn to disease. The lucrative character of disease is incalculable. Like crime, it is an inexhaustible source of income, and if it disappeared thousands of people would be ruined. The entire medical profession, hospital staffs, chemical industries and the allied trades, every school of medicine and surgery, depend on the persistence of pathological conditions. But a perfect world would be a stagnant world, and it is out



of the disorder and calamity of one half of mankind that the other half gets its living. And if we consider what is known as spiritual disease the same dilemma meets us. The dogma of sin, for example, has been a factor in the creation of immense wealth. In some form or other it has appeared in every known religion, and it has afforded employment to countless millions of human beings throughout history. All the religions began with the sense of sin, and then were syndicated. Their wealth has been represented by lands, temples, and palaces, and by unreckonable quantities of silver and gold. The belief in sin and the fear of consequences have assured the material if not the moral salvation of millions of priests. What the old theologians used to call the satanic element has been a fertile worker in the region of economics, because enormous material values have grown round the religious effort to combat it. We hear the rattle of the money-boxes everywhere, and even faith has submitted to be drawn within the orbit of finance. Besides, it is to the belief in sin and in redemption that we owe the glories of Christian architecture and art. The architects who planned the cathedrals, the workmen who built them, the sculptors and the painters who adorned them, the glass-stainers, the makers of gold and

silver ornaments for the altars and of costly vestments for the clergy, the publishers and printers of the hundreds of millions of copies of the sacred book and of the vast literature which has grown round it, have all depended for their material comfort on the existence of what is called sin. A religion passes away when no more believers in it are left, and only as long as human depravity lasts can the dogmas which condemn it remain a source of revenue. Like the judge who depends for his income on the criminal whom he denounces, so the priest or minister of any religion is, whether he knows it or not, in a state of parasitic symbiosis with the sinner.

A more startling problem is suggested by the manner of origin of Christian civilization. In the development of the Gospel drama the disloyal disciple Judas, aided and abetted by the Scribes and Pharisees, becomes an indispensable agent. Without his treachery there could have taken place no sacrifice of the Son of Man, and therefore no redemption. If we accept the Gospels as the official account of the event, the unavoidable conclusion is: No Judas, no Jesus. We are asked to believe that the great tragedy had been foretold by the prophets of Israel, and, since prophecy was the naïve statement of the fatalistic doctrine, the issue

at Calvary was inevitable. But it is at least disquieting to discover that the religious evolution of Europe and a great portion of the rest of mankind was actually in the hands of an individual of low character who accepted a bribe as the price of the betrayal of his Master. Nevertheless, his act made possible the moral regeneration of the world, and if it had not been committed we should not be enjoying the benefits of the Christian religion. Of all the paradoxes which have slipped unnoticed into human consciousness and have slept undisturbed through generation after generation, this is the most baffling. In the heart of what is accepted as the most ethically pure of all religions, we meet with a bewildering moral dilemma. The final enigma which faces the Christian is his debt to Judas Iscariot.

To what conclusions do all those strange facts lead us? The answer is to be found in the words of the founder of Christianity: "It must needs be that offences come." So that evil is a necessity. A dramatist could construct no drama at all if his characters were utterly blameless, passionless, and pure. At least some of them must be tainted. If he desires action and movement he must introduce an element of combat and the collision of wills. Some dissonance is required even in a comedy.

And so in the arena of life we cannot imagine a wholly static and rigid condition. In that case there could be no life, for life means decay and reparation, flowering and fading, rising and falling of individuals and types. It means perpetual annihilation and perpetual reconstruction. It means always some kind of war. The paradox which blazes its trail through human experience reappears in the moral life because "goodness" depends for its meaning on "wickedness," and each virtue has significance only because there is a vice opposed to it. There thus seems to be a dynamism in what we call evil, just as in order to stimulate the growth of the fairest fruits and the loveliest flowers we saturate their roots in offensive manure. Cowdung is recommended for strawberry beds. We must accept as best we may the disturbing fact that out of the malodorous compost of the immoral what we call morality obtains its meaning. But we are the receivers as well as the victims of unexamined tradition passed idly on from age to age. And, unfortunately, exploded fallacies may have already done their own peculiar kind of damage, just like exploded shells. So that we are left to pick our way painfully out of the debris of broken beliefs. Pascal described man as "an incomprehensible monster." But surely the reason is to

be found in the fact that the two worlds of which he is a member—the world of nature and the world of human beings—are also incomprehensible and often monstrous. Besides, there is a factor of which Pascal was not aware—the factor of heredity, which adds serious complications to the human problem. For the individual cannot be explained merely as a unit in nature and a unit in human society. He has his own special and private problem, which depends on the physical equipment, the temperamental and nervous apparatus, which he received at birth. He is the latest representative of converging lines of ancestors, and he does not know what his ancestors may have been doing with themselves. Thinkers like Pascal and Saint Augustine describe him as loaded with shackles, and the truth is now far clearer to us than it could have been to them. For many of the shackles have been bequeathed, and they are of a biological kind. It may be that man is Nature's most blazing indiscretion, but the capacity for indiscretion has likewise been handed down. Saint Augustine says that he heard the clanking of the chains of mortality. In our next section we may listen for a moment to the clanking of the chain of heredity.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ENTANGLEMENT OF HEREDITY

HEREDITY is the line of communication between an organism and its ancestors. It is true that the line has been snapped, nevertheless vibrations and reverberations from a long-past persist in the detached unit. Each human being, for instance, is the result of a life process infinitely complex and of infinite duration, reaching back to the origin of the race and far beyond it to still earlier types. It is as if millions of threads stretched longitudinally and already entangled had been joined laterally from the beginning by millions of other threads in an inextricable network. The fact that the human embryo is *attached* by an actual cord to the body of its mother is already of profound significance. For the mother and the father, too, had once been embryos, and had been likewise linked physically to their own mothers, and so on in an interminable series backwards. So that one generation is bound to the preceding not metaphorically but by a real physical life-line. The implications are immense, and they have revolutionized the entire science of

man. Heredity is repetition. It is, indeed, repetition with a difference, because offspring not only resemble their parents but vary from them. Yet the repeated characteristics are always present, and they may be moral and mental as well as physical. They may even lie latent to reappear like recurring decimals. There can be no exaggeration in saying that each of us was in the making hundreds of thousands of years ago, and that not only our immediate but our most remote forerunners had our lot of life in their hands. The acorn is made of the actual substance of the oak from which it fell, just as the human offspring is made of the actual substance of its parents. Thus stated, heredity may appear to be a very simple fact, but the mechanism of transmission presents us with a very complicated fact, and involves a problem which may never be fully solved. The process of the commingling of the primal germs has been investigated, and light has been thrown upon it. But since germ plasm or protoplasm is already alive, we are no nearer the revelation of the thing called life. The origin of consciousness eludes pursuit. We cannot believe that the rudimentary cells which build up the human body are already conscious in the usual meaning of that word, and yet consciousness is the final result of their interfusion and amalgamation.

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In truth, the living edifice seems to rise like the palace of Aladdin out of nothing or very nearly nothing. What are those obscure cells, viscous and glutinous like mistletoe berries, which, in spite of their microscopic size, enfold in atomic form the coming structure of the complete individual? No doubt their number and their bulk increase, during the process of cell division, owing to absorption of nourishment, but in them alone lie the architecture and the potency of the entire organism. They have neither bone nor muscle, but the creature to be evolved from them will be both muscular and bony. Deaf, they yet hold the elements of hearing; blind, they hold the elements of sight; silent, they yet contain the whole apparatus of speech! Touch, taste, and smell can scarcely be theirs, and yet those three senses will emerge fully developed out of them. And from their low-grade sentiency—if in any true sense they happen to be sentient at all—there will rise the full flood of human consciousness.

The common English expression, "a chip from the old block," implies crudely the whole truth of heredity; but the "block" was a living block and the "chip" is also alive, and the precise manner of the biological carry-over from the one to the other is a matter of controversy. Our word "congenital" (derived from the Latin *gignere*, to beget) likewise



presupposes the link of heredity because it means all that belongs to a human being from birth. For our purpose in this book we are more interested in what belongs to him mentally and morally by way of inheritance, but we are compelled to glance at the physical equipment prepared for him. It may be doubtful whether the newly-born child comes "trailing clouds of glory," but at least he trails the integuments of heredity with him, and his first swaddling clothes are really those which nature gives him. They are woven of living stuff, and beneath the incunabula of skin there lies many a secret which he must discover later for himself. If he comes of a stock physically, mentally, and morally sound he may later rejoice in the forces which they bequeathed to him. But if any of his predecessors were smitten by disease or by mania he may live to deplore the mutilated gift of life which they handed down.

It is convenient to approach this great problem of the inheritance of life as it appears in its simplest form among plants. Let us follow the guidance of a trained observer as he explains what happens when, for example, a clump of strawberries gives birth to new clumps.<sup>1</sup> Branches rise vertically from the ground, and on the branches there appear in due

<sup>1</sup> Etienne Rabaud, *L'Hérédité*; Paris, 1930.

order leaves, blossom, and fruit. The plant is now a well-defined individual isolated in the soil, and it continues to produce annually its own delicate little harvest. Sooner or later, however, it sends forth other branches not vertically but horizontally, and they creep along the ground. On the horizontal offshoot knots appear at a certain distance from each other, and at each knot roots begin to grope their way downwards while branches with leaves sprout upwards. Later come the blossom and the fruit, so that there has taken place a repetition of the process already exhibited by the parent stem. There may be slight variations in the form of the leaves. Instead of the compound leaf of the parent plant, which was a leaf with three divisions, the daughter plants may have leaves with only two divisions called folioles, or the leaf may even be single. But in all essential aspects the offspring reproduces the parent type. At the approach of autumn the horizontal attachment, which is like an umbilical cord connecting the mother plant with the daughters, begins to wither and break away so that the new clusters are liberated and become independent. In their turn and in exactly the same manner those new clusters will give birth to other clusters of strawberries, and so on until the whole field becomes covered. This is heredity at work in

one of its simplest forms, asexual heredity, and yet even in such a case variation, as we have seen, may take place. The slight divergence from the parent stem is explained, at least in part, by differences in nourishment, changes in the soil or in the climate. Nevertheless, continuity of type is not broken, and it cannot be broken because the actual substance of the parent is distributed among the offspring.

The problem becomes far more complex, however, if the progeny is the result of a sexual union between two individuals each of whom possesses special traits and dissimilar qualities. For in this case there is a double origin of the offspring, and each of the parents contributes a share. But the transmission of "characters" becomes even more striking because the features now of one parent now of the other appear among the descendants in the case of mankind as well as in the case of animals and plants. The experiments of Gregor Mendel are familiar to all who take an interest in the fascinating problem of hereditary transfer. He subjected to cross fertilization certain specimens of the edible pea, and found that a red-flowered pea crossed with a white-flowered pea produced seeds from which sprang exclusively peas with red flowers. In this case, therefore, the offspring resembled only one of the parents. Had the white variety, then, been wholly suppressed?

No, for in the second generation, that is to say in the offspring of the purely red variety, the white reappeared along with the red. In other words, the individuals of this new generation resembled both grandparents. We need not trouble ourselves with the proportion in which this resemblance took place because we are eager to fasten our attention on the essential fact of transmission. It was not a case of what used to be explained as a freak, an accidental "return to type." The same experiment produced the same results over and over again. It was a case of latent or "recessive" characters sleeping through one generation and waking up in the next. This is exactly what happens in the case of human families. Just as certain plants give birth to offspring intermediate in colour—blue and yellow, for instance, in the parents being followed by violet in the next generation—so this form of what we might call biological compromise is visible also among animals and mankind. The coupling of grey mice with black mice brought forth a litter coloured dark grey. Similar results were obtained by Bateson in the case of poultry, black and white plumage in the parents being replaced in their young by plumage of a bluish tinge. The bluish feathers were examined under the microscope, and a mosaic of black and white patches was discovered.

These are definite results, and the same kind of results happen in the case of the human family. Three or four generations of human beings if subjected to controlled experiments of this kind would exhibit the working of the same law. The conclusion is that what is called fatalism has actually biological foundations. Nothing is so easily recognizable as family likeness persisting even amid variations. The human race is not exempt from the operation of the principle of hereditary transmission which ensures the permanence not only of physical but of moral and mental characteristics. A remarkable example of the presence of the features of both parents was found in the offspring of a goldfinch and a canary. The young birds displayed up to the first moulting the plumage of the goldfinch and later the plumage of the canary. This alternation has been called "transitory dominance" of one type instead of another in contrast to cases of fixed dominance. If we could imagine a male European of to-day covered like an animal with black hair and a female covered with brown, their children would have either black or brown hair or hair of some colour between the two. In fact this is what happens among the Ainus of the island of Yezo in North Japan. They are the most hirsute people on the globe, their bodies being abundantly

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provided with black or brown hair, and their children carry on this external characteristic of the race.

Nature is often extravagant in her waste of life, and especially of seed, but in her method of generating species she is economical and conservative. She repeats the same process unweariedly, and makes use of a single formula in the creation of numberless types of embryos. For example, she adopts the principle of cell division for building up the bodies of multicellular creatures whether those creatures happen to have four legs or only two. The physical beginnings of the human being are subjected to the conditions which control the gestation of far lowlier organisms. The human body is multicellular, and the formation of its embryo is the result of the same process of cell division which characterizes the embryonic stage of all other multicellular types. Step by step the foetus repeats the series of changes which the parents had gone through when they also were only embryos. The bodily structure, the nervous network, the tissues, the fibres, the convolutions of the brain, the reflex movements of the heart—every item of the inventory has been inherited. We do not require here to consider the problem as to the exact localization of the "factors" of heredity, but it is obvious that being double in their origin they must issue from

the germ plasm of both parents. For our needs in this humble and tentative investigation of human destiny the simple fact of transmission is enough, because it implies that the channels of influence were already open and operating long before birth. We are attempting to accumulate proof of a biological fatality which precedes other kinds of fatality in human experience. We are glancing at the foundations of our being in order to remind ourselves that in the case of man who, as a member of society, becomes later loaded with responsibilities and is judged as a free agent, heredity must always be a momentous fact. For his body and his brain were being fashioned long before he could become aware of either of them. He had no choice in the matter of a blood stream which may be pure or impure, and he comes helpless out of the biological lottery. But what part the "chromosomes" play and how they play it, what happens to the "nuclei" and how the somatic cells are built up does not affect our argument. Theory may dislodge theory regarding the actual mode of inheritance of characters innate or acquired. But no theory can destroy the truth that the new generation is made of the substance of the old and that defects as well as good qualities are inherited. The heart is beating long before birth, the nervous system is already obscurely functioning,

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and the fully developed embryo is like a clock wound up and ticking although concealed. There may still be persons naïve enough to suppose that the germs of free will can be discovered in the germ cells of the parents. But it will be admitted that a passive embryo attached whether it will or no by an umbilical cord is a remarkable vehicle for the conveyance of a personality considered to be wholly free. At this stage the reactions are only mechanical as the obscure pulsations of being begin. A kink in the umbilical cord causing obstruction and a diminished flow of nourishment will have disastrous effects on the physical, mental, and perhaps moral well-being of the future citizen. But the embryo, the presumed carrier of a power of absolutely unfettered choice, lies passive, and unable to remedy the state of affairs which will govern all future action. The channel of its life and nourishment may thus be also the channel of disease. It is known that certain diseases of the parents involve corresponding disease of the nerve groups of the offspring, and that among all the causes of such nervous damage hereditary predisposition is the commonest and the most active. Pathological inheritance may descend not merely from the parents but from the grandparents and from remote ancestors (Mott). It is probably inaccurate to say that any disease is



actually inherited, and the phrase "hereditary predisposition" seems rather vague and abstract. But it appears, for instance, that such microbes as the too notorious *spirochæta pallida* may travel into the embryo, do travel and create havoc in the nerve centres. Mott's investigations into the degeneration of the neurones as a result of syphilitic contamination in the parents are incontrovertible and final. The offspring of the feeble-minded likewise inherit the parental affliction, and it was proved in many cases of idiocy examined in the London County Asylums that heredity had played its fatal part. The fact that tuberculosis would decline if persons smitten by it remained childless shows the sinister rôle of parentage in the fortunes of the race. A pure river flowing to the sea may be joined in its course by one or more streams that are impure. In the same way marriage has caused an intermingling of blood streams, and we never know till too late if any virus has infected the *vis viva* passed on by one generation to another. The adoption of the policy of human sterilization, however disagreeable it may be, is a sign that the truth of the doctrine of heredity has impressed the modern world. It is an attempt to control the fatality of inheritance. The most ancient family is only a thing of recent date compared with the inter-

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minable lines of its forerunners stretching back nameless and unknown into the darkness of the pre-historic world. The biological chain, like every other chain of causation, produces inevitable effects. The human being appears in the scene of existence as the unavoidable result of certain desires, impulses, instincts felt by his parents. How can he be free? His origins and his bodily and mental equipment lay beyond his own control and choice. It is difficult to understand how a being who starts life as an involuntary agent can become a voluntary one. In the old controversies the will was described as a mysterious entity existing in isolation like a spiritual rudder in the human personality and guiding or misguiding it. But all such abstractions are the survivals of an unscientific psychology. The will is a name and label for certain forms of energy just as the memory is a name and label for other forms of energy possessed by a being who can both act and remember. Even if it were something mystic dwelling within us, it too must have been inherited. In that case the newly-born infant receives one half of his free will from one parent and the other half from the other, but this reduces the theory to absurdity.

If, on the other hand, certain thinkers who accept the doctrine of evolution, and therefore also the

allied doctrine of hereditary enchainment, nevertheless attempt to find room for some sort of free will they are met by an awkward dilemma. At what point in the ascent of mankind from their anthropoid progenitors did the will begin to be free? It cannot be denied that apes and monkeys display will power. Are their wills free? If so, they too must be more or less moral beings responsible for their conduct. If not, by what miracle was the gift of free will bestowed upon a being, neither wholly man nor wholly ape, who stood on a kind of no man's land or no ape's land with perhaps one still prehensile foot across the human border? We may venture to offer later certain views on the conduct and the misconduct of human life, and we may discover a reason and basis for moral action. But before pronouncing upon obligations it is at least fair to take note of the handicaps which may make their fulfilment difficult. In the preceding pages we have been considering some of those impedimenta which Nature gathers around and within a human being as she prepares his entrance into the great amphitheatre of existence. We have at least indicated that no human life starts in a vacuum, and that the elements of our being are interlinked and interlocked in the fabulous entanglement of causes which operate in the worlds of nature and of man.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE RÔLE OF EDUCATION

THE life process is like a musical theme with variations. It is in the initial movement that the variations in a piece of music have their origin and meaning, and they always return to it. In the same way in the scheme of nature change and continuity often work harmoniously together. But in the world of mankind the tendency towards variation has always been suppressed. The human race remained stagnant during thousands of years. There is reason to believe that mankind were in existence hundreds of thousands of years ago, and yet to-day there are still numerous uncivilized tribes on the globe. Immense tracts of time divided one main stage of progress from another. Thousands of years separated the first rude stone implement from the first implement in iron. Nature seems to have side-tracked mankind in order to allow them to work out their own destiny in their own way, and the process has been exceedingly slow. The chief cause has lain in the fear of experiment and

change. Early customs and beliefs became fixed, and he who attempted to alter them was accursed. But the conception of Taboo or the Forbidden, which appears in some form or other in all savage life and which had actually sometimes a beneficent influence, has also played an important rôle in civilization. Laws, institutions, ideas, and beliefs remained static and unaltered during many ages. They were taboo, inviolate, lifted above criticism, untouched and untouchable. This tendency towards fixity was the new fact which emerged almost as soon as primitive society became consolidated. Viscosity is the power which a substance possesses of resisting any rearrangement of its molecules. Human society became viscous, and as its organization grew more and more elaborate a rigid caste system was introduced which in many disguised forms still exists. The variform life of nature in which endless experiments are made in the multiplication of types was arrested within the human agglomerations so that interminable ages of monotony lay before mankind. It is true that the races diverged into white, yellow, brown, and black, but the physical characteristics of each of those divisions have remained tenacious and practically permanent. It is also true that innumerable variations of language took place, but this fact only brings into

prominence the isolation of each group determined to work out its own social customs. Exogamy or the custom which compelled a man to marry outside his tribe arose only after the danger of incest and of intermarriage within the tribe had been discovered. A coalition is impossible if its elements vary too greatly among themselves, and therefore uniformity became a necessity in primitive society. The orbit of the individual life was required to be concentric with the life of the tribe, not eccentric to it. Anxious to hold together and aware by instinct of the peril of divergence, each human group sacrificed variation to continuity. And education was the means employed to hold the individual in check and to prevent any departure from established custom.

What is education? It is the attempt of the older generation to force its knowledge, and especially its moral notions and its religious beliefs, on the younger.<sup>1</sup> Education has always existed, and it may be seen at work even among the animals. Parent birds teach their brood how to fly as they call them from the nest. At the end of summer the elder swallows train the new generation in the art of collective flight so as to prepare them for the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Herbert Spencer's *Education* and the article "Education" in the *Ency. Brit.*

coming migration. Cats in play teach their kittens, and dogs their puppies, the first principles of attack and defence. It is obvious that primitive races must have given some kind of instruction to their children and their adolescents, otherwise tribe after tribe would have perished. Skill in the chase, in the use of bow and arrow, in the use of stone hammer, borer, cutter, and axe, in the use of bone needle and spindle implied the beginning of technical education. There was rudimentary military training in the management of the spear whether the spear-head happened to be blunt and rough or sharp and polished. Factories where stone weapons and implements of all sorts were made have been unearthed in widely distant sites, and there were certainly apprentices for all such different trades. But stone tools of exactly the same kind and shape have been found in Asia, Africa, and Europe. There is no hint of innovation during thousands of years, and the makers of such tools had never been in contact. Standardization set in early, and had retardatory effects. No doubt periods overlapped, and the methods of one age lingered into the next. But even the age of polished stone implements is separated by a great interval from the Stone Age on the one side and the Bronze Age on the other. Variation was difficult and slow in the case of early

man. Orthodoxy, in fact, is one of the most primitive conceptions in secular as well as in religious affairs. It is the drag on the human coach. Education, which is the means of progress, has also been the means of delay and even of retrogression. Civilization itself affords numerous examples of the wilful shrinkage of the area of knowledge when, as during the Middle Ages, new theories and investigations were forbidden. But the educational apparatus for checking advance was early in operation. For instance, there were tribes in which for religious reasons fish and fishing were taboo. The fact seems trivial, but it had an important influence on the tribe's fortunes. It meant not only that such a tribe lost a valuable element of nourishment, but that it also lost the opportunity of acquainting itself with the use of sea craft and river craft, and so remained ignorant of navigation. Thus a fishing tribe who had ventured on lake, river, or sea could invade and conquer the landmen. This was a case, therefore, in which compulsory education in the form of taboo was injurious. The truth is that religious education was made compulsory from the beginning. In tribal life animal worship was widespread. Some groups worshipped bears, others sharks, serpents, tigers, or wolves. Suppose that it had been possible for an early savage to consider



and to point out that it was absurd to worship a bear or a shark, he would have been put to death for heresy just as the medieval Church put Giordano Bruno to death and punished Galileo because they had expressed opinions contrary to the theological doctrines of their day. Perpetual repetition of beliefs and views of life already fixed by usage became the rule in human society, and education was and still is the means of enforcing them from childhood. And yet the efforts towards independence began early, at least in the realm of imagination. Perhaps the most striking of the discoveries of the archæologists is the series of drawings and paintings on cave walls together with engravings on reindeer's antler or mammoth's tusk recalling memories of the chase. Art was already throwing its rainbow across the darkness of man's early world. But to what long midnight of intellectual torpor and death was the human race doomed !

If we now move up to higher levels we shall find that each generation received a mass of instruction which sooner or later was rejected as useless. We are attempting to show that to the fatality which reaches us from the side of nature there was added very early the fatality of our human surroundings. Throughout childhood and up to adoles-

cence the new generation is always in the clutch of the elder. We do not mean to infer that that tight grasp is necessarily either cruel or injurious. It may even be helpful and indispensable, but its effects whether good or bad are fatal in the sense of being inevitable. If those influences were withdrawn the new generation would differ enormously from the old. No doubt the children of Babylon and of Nineveh were taught some lessons which were valuable to them when they became in later life members of Babylonian and Assyrian society. Babylonia gave birth to an elaborate civilization in which public law, business knowledge, trade connections on a vast scale, astronomical science, navigation, architecture, sculpture, and literature were highly developed. But a school book from Babylon or Nineveh or even from Athens or Rome might require to be revised out of recognition in order to be of much use to the school-children of to-day. It would contain theories of knowledge, and especially of belief, which the world has forgotten. The children of antiquity, for instance, were taught to revere gods and goddesses who, we now know, never existed. The whole background of their education, therefore, was an illusion just as the philosophical and religious background of our own day may be an illusion. The children of

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the Arabs. There were humanists in Greece long before Humanism, but their ways of thinking and feeling would not be recovered until after a long and barren interregnum of ecclesiastical education.

It was, in fact, during the Middle Ages that the danger of education as a paralysing force became more and more visible. The extension of the boundaries of knowledge was actually forbidden, and only a few bold thinkers disobeyed at their peril. During a thousand years of sterile Christian controversy mental activity was allowed to exercise itself only within the meagre limits of theological dogma. The stake stood ready for the intellectual rebels. Any attempt at variation instantly aroused suspicion. Interminable discussion which has now no importance whatever occupied the most ingenious minds of the period. Scholasticism was a vast exertion in logic which had been provided with false premisses so that however skilful the manipulation of the syllogisms might be the conclusions had no ultimate meaning for mankind. Students were harassed and their time was wasted by such questions as whether the *same* substance permeated the Trinity or whether the substance of the Son, for example, was only *like* the substance of the Father. The modern world has lost

all interest in the question. In what are called the ages of faith, but which were really the ages of intolerance, it was only religious education which was compulsory just as in the case of savage tribes. When its own day came, Protestantism arrogated to itself the same right of control over education which Catholicism had already exercised. Calvin, one of the enemies of the human race, caused the citizens of Geneva to swear by parties of ten that they would maintain the Genevan Confession, and refusal meant immediate personal danger. When Michael Servetus, the pantheist, who had accidentally arrived in the city fell at last into Calvin's hands he was burned alive by way of punishment. Religious education was at its zenith, and flourished in the name of the gospel of good-will. There were certainly great theological doctors in the heyday of the Church, such as Albertus Magnus and his greater pupil Thomas Aquinas, but their attempt to unite faith and reason failed, and they prolonged fallacies which had misled generations of students. In a magnificent phrase Dante calls Saint Dominic "the holy athlete."<sup>1</sup> Roger Bacon, however, is a far more important name in the history of human progress, but because he criticized the barrenness

<sup>1</sup> "Il santo atleta." *Paradiso* XII. 56.

of the religious teaching of his day he was, in the interests of education, forbidden to publish his books, and was thrown into prison for fourteen years. There was, indeed, no safety for anyone who could not declare, *Credo quia absurdum est*, although it should be admitted that Saint Anselm improved that famous formula.<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly minds were made more acute by applying logic even to valueless material. But it was like sharpening knives on an inferior grindstone which only damages the blade. If we turn to Montaigne we shall find a searching impeachment of a system of education which lingered into his own day and which, in his view, created only "asses laden with books." Montaigne said that it is putting an exaggerated worth on one's own opinions to burn men alive in vindication of them. And yet it was this threat against the liberty of thinking which lay behind the educational code that had guided and misguided the European mind since the fall of the Roman Empire. It was still the voice of the Renaissance in Montaigne which made him cry, "Make the world your school book."<sup>2</sup> A good instance of human inertia and fear of change is to be found in the fact that a

<sup>1</sup> "Credo ut intelligam."

<sup>2</sup> "Somme, je veux que ce (le monde) soit le livre de mon escolier." *Essais*, Liv. I, Ch. XXVI.

celebrated Latin Grammar, no 'doubt important as a landmark of learning but containing many errors, was in use in the medieval curriculum during a thousand years. The hour struck at last, however, when a profitless didactic system was more or less abandoned, and the Renaissance saved Europe from becoming a mental Sahara. Christian education resulted in the wars of religion, the Inquisition, and the horrors of intolerance and persecution. At least for intellectual salvation it was found necessary to return to the Pagan world, and the men of the Renaissance led the way.

In the game of chess the smallest piece is the pawn, and on the chess-board of education the child has always been sacrificed in the interests of uniformity. All the great religious systems have taken hold of him in his most impressionable years, so that he is compelled to accept in passivity doctrines which even the maturest intellect, if honest with itself, must admit that it cannot comprehend. Moreover, the rival camps have invariably carried on their instructional programmes against each other. In Hindu schools the children are taught to abhor all that is Moslem, and in Moslem schools they are taught to abhor all that is Hindu. In Catholic schools a distorted account

of Protestantism is provided, and in Protestant schools a distorted account of Catholicism. So that education results in accumulated bias. In our own day we witness the fact that political education has also become compulsory like a new and powerful religion. In truth, the human stage appears to be rotatory, and now in various lands scenes are being re-enacted which were enacted long ago. Education, in fact, has once more assumed its sinister power. In imitation of religious models the State has again taken charge of the children in order to fill their minds only with those doctrines which authority desires should prevail. In the Fascist schools of Italy a distorted account is being given of liberty, liberalism, and individual rights and duties; in Soviet schools the history, the origin and meaning of democracy as well as of capitalism are being falsified, and in the third Reich, where books which contained even a hint of the doctrine of individual liberty were publicly burned, as Omar is alleged to have burned the manuscripts of Greece, racial hate is being taught as a national duty. This resurrection in the twentieth century of medieval and oriental methods of education and government makes one despair of humanity. Such training results in collective hallucination so that the individual enters into life with his liberty of



thinking already destroyed. The few may be able to unlearn what they have been forced to learn, but the great mass become like sheep that must all bleat in the same way. In what sense can this kind of citizen be called a free agent? He is merely the victim of collectivism and of mass education which are the creators of mass delusion.

If we leave out of account the special training which forms artists in the widest sense of that word we find that the technical character of modern education has become more and more strongly marked. It is considered as the best preparation for what is called the battle of life, and that battle is regarded as chiefly of an economic kind. The objective is individual gain, and "getting on" is the ideal suggested. Looming ahead of the school-boy and the schoolgirl, and still more ominously ahead of the adolescent, lies the scene of life as a great money conflict with one's fellow beings. There is little or no time at all for decent preparation in the liberal arts, and education which should be the creator of individual freedom and serenity becomes a creator of individual slavery and vulgar unrest in a contest for vulgar prizes. No doubt that in developing the stronger brains at the expense of the weaker, education is fulfilling its function,

but it only intensifies the fierce competition in the great auction mart of human talent. After the Franco-German war of 1870, French statesmen declared that the German victory had been won by the German schoolmasters. France immediately began to reorganize her own educational system in a perfectly legitimate effort at self-protection. But such facts seem to throw a startling light on the paradox which so frequently accompanies human activity. With the suddenness of the changes of the Genii in the *Arabian Nights* the messengers of good can transform themselves into messengers of evil. There seems to be often only a shadow between safety and danger. Education which lifted mankind above the beasts might become the cause of their ruin. For there can be no doubt that the dreaded character of the last war and of the next has been caused by the scientific progress which took place in the last quarter of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century. There is a bomb "Elektron" which, on combustion, is able to increase the temperature to 3000 degrees Centigrade. Such bombs weigh less than six pounds, so that a fleet of aeroplanes carrying thousands of them could destroy cities like Paris and London within a few hours. There are new toxic compounds which if used in the form of

poison bombs could annihilate entire populations in a night. Behind all such inventions there lies an elaborate educational system, so that education itself has become a new factor in the human confusion.

Two great groups of forces—primary and secondary—play on the individual life. These are the forces of nature and the forces of civilization. Political and educational institutions are among the most powerful of the secondary forces, and they are the necessary result of their historical eras. It might be said, therefore, that it is illogical to condemn anything or anybody. But the philosophy of the inevitable is wrongly supposed to be a philosophy of stagnation. On the contrary, it is a philosophy of movement. So that the forces of condemnation and criticism, resistance and antagonism, counter-revolution and reform are also inevitable, and are, in fact, the mechanism of historical change.

## CHAPTER V

### WHAT IS MORALITY?

EDUCATION, then, is a kind of hypnosis. Numerous influences begin to spray upon us as soon as we appear in the world. In the home, the church, the school, the university, in the workshop and the place of business and in society we are syringed by suggestion and saturated in make-believe. The long experience of the race is not stored up in the individual as instinct is stored in the animals. Each human being must begin anew, and set about learning his own particular lesson. We are not like bees that know how to make perfect honey immediately without the aid of a schoolmaster. So that we become *farcis*, as the French say, stuffed and crammed by a process of mental feeding, and when the process is at an end, few of us have the courage and candour of Montaigne, who asked, "What do I know?" Awaiting all of us on our advent there are ready-made clothes for our minds as well as for our bodies. But so far as our mental furnishing is concerned we are given only an inch tape to measure immeasurable things. Even the smallest things

refuse to yield their secret. For example, botanists tell us that the wheat berry is made up of some six distinct parts. There is the epidermis or outer skin, the epicarp or second skin, the endocarp or third, then the episperm and the embryous membrane, and finally the endosperm or kernel for the sake of which all this elaborate coat of mail is worn. But no one can tell us what is the secret of the life hidden in the kernel. All we know is that flour comes from the endosperm, and is capable of nourishing organisms like our own. Human knowledge, in fact, is only a limited clearing in a limitless jungle. We cry out our questions, and we listen for answers as children listen to the echoes of their own voices among the rocks. But echoes are not answers. To ultimate questions there are no answers at all. At first, indeed, we are compelled to lean upon education and books as children lean upon their nurses. But when we remember that even the fullest book is merely the epitome of an epitome, that a thousand causes remain unknown, that hardly a statement can be made that cannot be challenged, and that theories have a habit of vanishing, we begin at last to notice that we are receptive only as a sieve is receptive, and retain little. We smile at the pharmacopœia in use in the age of Pliny, but future generations may smile at the ideas

which govern our own age. A thousand years hence modern education may appear absurd and old-fashioned. We were brought up in the belief that Newton's system of gravitation was final and irreplaceable, but we are now told that it requires modification. Michelson's earlier experiments on the velocity of light appeared to prove that that velocity was constant, but his later experiments proved that it varies. Affirmations and denials reach us from all sides on all subjects. On gateposts there is often fixed a placard—"Beware of the Dog." On the gateways of knowledge there should be a similar warning—"Beware of the Dogmatist." For all knowledge ends only in a point of interrogation. Our difficulties are so many and so complex that we are not in the easy circumstances of the animals whose problems are immediately solved by their instincts. For instance, when the sand-storm rises in the desert the camel refuses to move. No coaxing nor beating can persuade him to proceed. Even although thirsty and aware that a desert well is near he restrains himself, remains immobile, and even lies down till the storm is past. We seem less wise who stagger through the sand-storms of theories and beliefs, and miss the well on the way.

Much importance has been attached to the words *educare*, to bring up, and *educere*, to lead forth, because

both meanings are embedded in our own word *education*. But, after all, what can be educed? Only instincts appear to be innate, and they require little encouragement. Indeed, it is as soon as they begin to announce themselves that a new kind of education in the form of moral training becomes necessary. Ordinary education is like the sharpening of claws which an animal carries out of its own accord in preparation for the coming battle. In the case of mankind moral education is an attempt to control the claws. Since we are making an effort in these pages to express a philosophy of life we are obviously compelled to consider, as best we can, the alluring problem of moral conduct. Why should we be moral?

Let us note to begin with, that even the child of civilized parents is born a savage. If we could imagine such a child isolated from the beginning from all civilizing influences, conveyed, let us say, in his swaddling clothes to an island where he could have only animals as his companions, he would, supposing he were capable of surviving, grow up without any knowledge of human speech and without any moral notions or scruples. Owing, of course, to hereditary influence he might betray certain human traits which, however, would be gradually lost because of the absence of the neces-

sary environment. He would have no words for "good" or "bad," and he would be without the moral emotions corresponding to them. But if he had been born with innate ideas of an ethical kind, if, for example, Kant's "moral law" or Bishop Butler's "conscience" had formed part of his inner birthright the environment should count for nothing. Those great guiding principles to which the German and the English philosophers gave such impressive expression should be able to make themselves felt independently of any surroundings. We know that this could not happen. Without human language and without moral training the child would grow up as a creature even far below the savage level. Therefore, the origins of moral feeling must be looked for elsewhere than in what is called intuition, and they can be found only in the training which the individual receives as a member of human society. Morality, in fact, is a human contrivance, and in some respects the most wonderful of all. It is one of mankind's most important interferences with the methods of nature. The presumption that it has anything to do with the rest of the cosmos is only a presumption. It is the result of a long process of discipline which, beginning in tribal life, has never ceased to operate with increasing complexity and subtlety in the world of civilized beings.



The rudiments of conduct are visible even among the animals, and rules of discipline are carried out in simian households. Signs of the sense of obligation and of the feeling of remorse are discoverable far below the human level. It has been observed by travellers, for instance, that on the approach of strangers or enemies a member of an ape's household is posted at a point of observation, generally on one of the high branches of a tree, in order to report on the enemy's movements. Photographs of the scene have actually been taken. Here, on the part of the ape sentinel, there is obviously already a duty to be performed, and we may be certain not only that the duty brings with it a feeling of responsibility and obligation, but that if badly performed it will be followed by reprimand and remorse, perhaps even by punishment. This is the sense of right and wrong in its elementary stage. We may watch it developing and becoming more and more complicated as we rise in the life level until it becomes the force which helps the human coalition to coalesce. It becomes the cement which hinders the social edifice from crumbling away. There is not a single moral conception which cannot be traced back to its origin in the intercourse and contact of human beings with each other. Aristotle, who always keeps close to life, constantly reminds us in his

great book on conduct that "virtue is a habit or trained faculty," and he denies that it is implanted in us even by nature. (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. II. 1 (2).)

What is morality? The word itself betrays its human origin. It means "custom" or "habit," in Latin *mos*, *mores*, and expresses the way of life of a community. It contains, therefore, nothing transcendental, and implies nothing existing in the human mind *before* its contact with experience. Later, the word came to denote "character" or the habits (*mores*) which an individual like his ancestors had acquired as members of a civic organization. An exactly similar explanation applies to the word "ethical." In the first paragraph of the second book of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle points out that "moral excellence is the result of habit or custom."<sup>1</sup> The Greek word for character or "moral excellence" is, as he adds, the same as the word for habit or custom with only a change of emphasis in the first syllable. Thus those two words "moral" and "ethical" bring us into immediate relation with mankind's own striving towards order in the life of the individual as well as in the life of the community. And it is not merely an affair of etymology. One by one the moral ideas may be

<sup>1</sup> Peters' translation.

watched developing in refinement and subtlety as human nature itself becomes more subtle and refined. What appears "immoral" to us appeared as "moral" in earlier ages. Even to-day the moral code differs in different races. Long ago among the lowest tribes the feeling of responsibility began to be evolved during the chase, for instance, when the capture of some animal depended on the prowess of the individual who had come nearest to it. His success or failure brought approval or disapproval, praise or blame, and therefore, as a result, satisfaction or remorse as the case might be. And when the safety of the tribe rested on the courage of its members their cowardice would involve punishment. It is thus in the ideas of approbation and disapprobation, with the menace of retribution in the background, that morality begins. We must never forget that civilized man as well as primitive man always acts in full view of an audience, or at least he knows that sooner or later he must give an account of his conduct and that his fellow men will express approval or censure in the form of awards or penalties. No matter what theory may be held regarding the motive of conduct, most thinkers are agreed that it is in approbation or disapprobation that the moral sense first displays itself. But the earliest manifestation of those feelings first appeared

in connection with the rude services of a material kind which every member of the community was expected to perform for the common good. Besides, moral behaviour is not peculiar to mankind. It would be unjust not to recognize its presence in the case of animals sacrificing themselves for the sake of their young. The hawk hovers above the lark's nest, and the mother makes a forlorn and pathetic effort to defend her brood before she and they are inevitably seized as prey. Who will say that she has no sense of "obligation," since that word means what *binds* (*ligare*), whether in the bonds of love or of law?

The truth is that the feelings of obligation and those connected with the word "ought" are very ancient and were alive even in primitive society. The mere fact of having been born into a community which will protect him and nourish him till he can provide for himself already implies a sort of commitments on the part of the individual, and as he grows towards manhood he becomes aware that he is expected to honour them. Obligation is thus whatever is (reasonably) expected of us. But the demand differs and changes with the differing and changing levels of human culture. What was expected of human beings at earlier stages in the experience of the race may be no longer expected of

them. It may even be forbidden as no longer in accordance with the general conception of what is fitting or useful in a given era of human history. To-day it would be accounted immoral on the part of a European if he had more than one wife, but in a polygamous tribe it is immoral not to have several because the tribe requires a constant and often rapid increase in its members either for the purpose of exploiting its surroundings or for the purpose of being able to withstand its foes. Among the Red Indians it was immoral not to scalp the enemy. If these and similar duties (duty being what is *due* or to be paid like a debt) were unfulfilled the result was punishment, so that the fear of punishment tended to develop the moral sense in favour of the customs or *mores* of the tribe. This is also the genesis of the feeling of fear which is never separable from what the civilized world knows as "conscience." We are thus in presence of conscience in its embryonic stage. Our customs have changed and therefore our morals have changed with them, but even in civilized life the fear of punishment or at least censure is one of the mainstays of conventional morality. It is also the guarantee that "conscience" will continue to function. An old Greek poet said that fear was the mother of religion or the gods. He might also have said that fear is

the father of morality, although, as we shall see, that kind of morality is by no means the highest possible in the case of a human being. Nevertheless, abolish the entire system of pains and penalties, let there be no more punishment for theft or fraud or murder, and modern society would instantly fall into chaos. The notions of duty and obligation are now accompanied by safeguards which remind the individual that sooner or later in the event of violation he must reckon with his fellow citizens. It is often a fallacy of moralists to read into ethical terms a refinement of meaning which did not originally belong to them. But if, as we believe, Ethics is an empirical science, we must pursue the genetic method in order to discover the genesis of the ideas of right and wrong. If we do so, Kant's impressive categorical imperative may be found to have had a very humble beginning. For example, the word "ought" is an old Saxon word meaning what is actually "owing" (*agan*) in cattle, material, or money. It meant that services rendered awaited payment, so that a word which we use to express the highest moral transactions has commercial transactions as its background. The equivalent word *sollen* in German, *to owe*, appears in Kant's "You can because you ought," but here a theory has risen out of it implying unconditional obligations which no prudent man

would accept. Moral ideas, like all others, have developed by gradation, and if Kant with his immutable moral law and the intuitionists with their "conscience" had lived into the Darwinian age they would have found it necessary to recast their systems. In all idealistic theories the moral ego is like a capital "I" engraved somewhere in the brain, and existing in splendid isolation not only from the world of ordinary experience but from the remainder of the human consciousness. "Conscience," it has been said, "seems at first sight to be the name of a single faculty or activity of the soul, and in this respect to be on a level with understanding, will, and the rest of the familiar terms of the old pre-scientific psychology. But we have all learned by now that a "faculty" of the soul is either nothing at all or a convenient name for an aggregate of individual states which agree in possessing some important features in common. What we mean by a man's conscience is the aggregate of his judgments and convictions as to what, from time to time, and in varying circumstances, he ought to do. . . . It is a complete psychological mistake to speak of the judgment of conscience as being in some way or other *sui generis*, and possessing a peculiar and incommunicable infallibility." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Taylor, *The Problem of Conduct*, pp. 148, 150; London, 1901.

According to this view conscience is a sort of moral memory assisting us to recall what is expected of us, so that ultimately moral action becomes more or less automatic. Conscience has been aptly described as being a labour-saving machine which enables the human being to know rapidly and with precision whether a proposed line of conduct which he is tempted to take may or may not meet with the approval of his fellows. Such a habit of mind is the effect of age-long adjustment to the social surroundings. And, as we have already seen, the moral apparatus requires to be set up afresh by education and training in every human new-comer. Conscience is the alarm bell which may or may not ring clearly and punctually in the mind of this or that individual.

If conscience were an infallible guide no one in possession of it should ever be even capable of making a mistake. On the contrary, we find that people who have honestly "obeyed the voice of conscience" sometimes require to change their decision after they have become aware of its consequences. There were, for instance, certain conscientious objectors who refused to take part in the war of 1914 in obedience to the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." When, however, they became aware that the nation was in danger, and



recognized that if every man acted as they had acted the liberties of the country would be overthrown, they joined the army. In other words, they were now governed by considerations of expediency which has nothing to do with "conscience" according to the orthodox view, and they ceased to obey the dictates of the mystic power which they had supposed to exist within themselves. In order not to be killed it was found necessary to kill, and this case affords a striking refutation of the Kantian theory of morals. Even Butler foresaw that a conflict between "conscience" and what he called "self-love" might take place although his own theory, if strictly put into practice, would be incapable of providing a logical issue. If a man attempts to murder you, no one would deny you the right to murder him in self-defence. Few human beings could be found who would agree with Kant that if at cross roads you met a murderer pursuing his victim and that if he asked you which way the potential victim had gone, you should tell the truth. All sensible people would, in such a case, tell a lie in order to put the murderer on the wrong track. In the conflict of duties, therefore, the rational rule appears to be that we should choose that kind of conduct which may do least harm. But this is utilitarianism, and we have thus

already abandoned the rigid sanctions of conscience. If a dying person asks for news which happens to be bad we deliberately inform him that the news is excellent so as not to endanger his condition and accelerate his end. When President Doumer was dying as the result of the bullet wounds which his assailant had inflicted, he asked his most intimate friend what had really happened, and the friend replied, "It was a motor accident." A more perturbing dilemma, mentioned by Taylor, occurs in the case of dangerous childbirth where the surgeon must choose between sacrificing the life of the child or of the mother. Common-sense would not hesitate for an instant, and would sacrifice the child. And yet certain Roman Catholic casuists reply that the mother should be sacrificed because, supposing her to be a Catholic and therefore baptized, her chance of salvation is almost assured, whereas the unbaptized infant might be exposed to danger in the next world. These are examples of the fact that the test of right or wrong must often be the effect on human well-being as a whole.

If the unchanging moral law within us forms part of the spiritual equipment of every human being, and if conscience is its vehicle, we have a right to inquire when it first began to operate in human history. It cannot be supposed to be the peculiar

privilege of Europeans or of civilized persons wherever they may have been born. The members of all races in all ages and at all stages of culture must have shared it. In short, it must have been prehistoric because millions of human beings lived and died before history began to be written. Were savages, then, endowed with conscience? Did it reign and rule during the long centuries of barbarism? Why did it not display itself among the cannibals? And surely it should not have sat idle during the massacres which invariably followed Babylonian and Assyrian victories, or during the centuries when whole nations were sold into slavery. Writers like Butler and Martineau, for whom conscience is "the seat of authority," should have explained why that seat was left wholly unoccupied during thousands of years. If it be replied that conscience too has its elementary stage and grows more and more authoritative, we agree at once because such an admission surrenders the entire position, and involves the acceptance of the theory of moral development by means of influences wholly human in their origin. The truth is that moralists have often fallen into a fallacy akin to another which flourished in the Middle Ages but which really has its roots in the Platonic philosophy. It was supposed that abstract ideas had as much

objective reality as the things which we see and touch. Not only did the oak tree and the pine tree exist, but *Tree* apart from any particular specimen of the genus also had a real, separate existence as an idea. To-day we find it difficult to imagine how such a mode of thinking was ever possible. But a similar error appears in the division of human consciousness into separate faculties such as "will," "desire," and "conscience," as if they were independent entities existing somehow side by side and frequently at war with each other. Conscience to which arbitrary powers were assigned is only a verbal variant of consciousness (*conscio*, I know), and means a particular kind of knowledge; in this case the knowledge of what is expected of us. In using abstract words as labels, modern as well as earlier psychologists and moralists attach them to "empties"—if we might borrow the language of freight carriers—since "empties" likewise get labelled.

To know what we ought to do, then, is to know what we are expected to do in a given stage of civilization, and conscience is the indicator. And it indicates reprisal as well as appreciation. But this form of morality in which conscience plays so large a part is by no means the highest. To begin with, what is expected of us may not imply a lofty but a

low standard, for the standards differ among different races and at different times. We shall see later what, according to our own view, the highest standard demands. But the rule stated is sufficient to keep the individual on good terms with his fellows, and this is what apparently satisfies most human beings. Behind the moral conduct of the great mass of mankind looms the shadow of authority. We thus come back to that constant need of uniformity which, as we saw, characterizes every human organization, and creates the great human *moutonnerie*. It is only in the region of taste that diversity is permitted, but there is even a tyranny of taste and fashion. In the realm of practice and action any flagrant deviation from established rule is punished because within the fold the wildness of nature cannot be tolerated. Society exists in order to reconcile the claims of egoism and altruism, which perhaps can never be really reconciled. But if retribution for a too voracious egoism ceased and if fraud could be committed with impunity there would take place a remarkable thinning of the ranks of the persons accounted moral. (Conventional morality busies itself mainly with the respect of property, including especially sexual property,) if we may venture to use such an expression, since the congested condition of the Divorce Courts in most

civilized countries appears to justify it. The fact that "damages" are sometimes "awarded" even to the offended husband is significant because it means that chastity or its loss may be expressed also in commercial terms. The morality of everyday life, the morality which enjoins the performance of the marriage vows, the payment of debt, the fulfilment of contracts, the production of a true balance sheet, and the sale of pure food is morality guaranteed by compulsion and punishment, and is therefore only an inferior and wholly imperfect expression of the moral ideal. It is merely a sign of the determination of mankind to preserve social unity and to crush or at least control the forces of dissolution. It is morality of "Give and Take," and it is often "Take" which contains the real motive of the transaction. But in its highest form ethical action has nothing to do with calculation, and the true moral sense is not dependent on Law.

Moreover, the origin of the moral sense cannot be found in religion. A moral act performed when mankind believed in numerous gods and goddesses has the same value as the same act performed to-day. In other words, neither a belief in theism nor a belief in polytheism has anything to do with the quality of ethical conduct. No doubt the feeling which accompanies a good act may be

intensified by the hope that it may receive divine approval, but the act itself in order to remain pure must be wholly independent of religious sanction. It carries its own certificate. Religion has almost invariably lagged behind the moral advance. The moral theory of Marcus Aurelius, for example, is infinitely purer than anything that can be found in the official religion of his day, and we feel that he is better than his gods, and has got beyond them. The inhuman reprisals on their enemies which military leaders of Israel such as Joshua carried out in the name of Israel's God, and the tortures inflicted in the name of Christianity by the Italian and the Spanish Inquisitions shock the moral sense. It is, of course, impossible to ascertain the actual historical or prehistorical moment when morality and religion went into partnership, but the partnership has often been injurious to morality. In any case it is quite impossible to believe that human beings had discovered "good" and "bad" in their divinities before they had discovered those qualities in themselves. Religion was called in as a sort of supernatural police in order to strengthen the approbation or the disapprobation of the community. And then the idea of sin was invented, original sin being, in our opinion, the naïve statement of the doctrine of heredity, just as prophecy, as we

have already said, should be regarded as the naïve statement of the doctrine of fatalism. Religion thus became the intensification and the prolongation of moral and legal sanctions, and it remains so till this day. The popular view that morality has its roots in religion is only the popular view although it is shared by timid and inaccurate thinkers. But it is unhistorical as well as unscientific. It puts the thunder before the lightning. The proof is that when believers wish to praise the object of their worship they have no epithets to apply except those which they use when they praise their fellow-men. Such words as "good," "merciful," "long-suffering," "slow to wrath" are human attributes. To praise means to prize (*preciare*), and it was in the arena of human life that prizes and praises were first bestowed. Their anthropocentric and anthropomorphic elements betray religion and morality as human inventions. To the fear of punishment by the community was added the fear of more awful punishment by the community's protecting god. Thus it was the vengeance of the tribal divinity justifying the vengeance of the tribe itself which first forged the link between morality and religion. We do not believe that any other logical relation can be found between them. Besides, morality grows in value as a pure human impulse just in so



far as it disentangles itself from religious ideas. Even the intuitionists have admitted that a moral act is not moral because it happens to be also a religious act. The teaching of Lao-Tsze (600 B.C.), in which the central thought is the return of good for evil, was developed apart altogether from any definite religious belief. And the system of Confucius (550-478 B.C.), in which the Golden Rule first appears—"What you would not that another might do to you, do not to him"—had likewise no religious sources behind it. In Islam, however, and in Christianity an elaborate scheme of rewards and punishments was evolved, with the result that an impure hedonistic element with disturbing effects entered into the moral ideal of both of those religions. We are inclined to think that in the case of Christianity the feature of menace and the picture of a Last Assize and of material suffering in a heated hell were added later by a priesthood already militant. The earliest Gospel known to us, Mark's, was written almost a hundred years after the events described. There were no shorthand reporters for those events, so that sufficient time had elapsed for a distortion of the tradition, the accumulation of error, and the pollution of the pure doctrine of the great religious revolutionary of Palestine. In any case, a system of prizes—"Great is your reward in

heaven"—and of punishments—"There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"—detracts from the moral value of any Ethic. On the one hand, religion became a means of increasing the sense of fear in order to hold the wicked in check, and on the other it was a business offer. Let it be understood that we are analysing religion and morality in their lower phases. Whereas the real value of any religion must always be expressed in moral terms, it is meaningless to attempt to express moral values in religious terms. From this point of view religion must always be subordinate to morality, and if the morality is inferior, so must the religion be. The lower forms of religion and morality as exploited by their *impresarios* go hand in hand. The true moral advance and, if you choose, the true religious advance is always inwards. It has nothing to do with a scheme of rewards and punishments, human or divine. Contrast the policy of Indulgences, which implies that the believer is buying his way to heaven, with the pure teaching of Lao-Tsze or of Marcus Aurelius in which goodness is its own reward. At their best the lower kinds of morality and religion are merely a kind of gendarmerie. It was this perception which caused Voltaire to forbid any sceptical discussion at his dinner-table in case it might have had the effect of making his servants dishonest. But if I

perform an act of honesty only because my fellow creatures expect it of me, or because some Higher Power expects it, my act is not strictly moral and, in the purest sense, it is not moral at all unless I expect it of myself.

What, then, is the essence of the moral act? Its essence lies in the feeling which accompanies it. Many important thinkers have not worried themselves with regard to the question of "motive" because it is frequently doubtful whether, for example, a just act has been performed for the sake of justice. Motives are difficult to track to their lairs and burrows in the human mind. A just act may have taken place because of fear of punishment or of the desire for applause. The same might be true of any deed that appears to be generous, for generosity is often prompted by the hunger for honour or honours. A man who has made a fortune by doubtful or dishonest means may, in order to cover up his past, spend money lavishly on charity, religion, or art, and thus be able to pose as a public benefactor. Even piety and ceremonial observance are often only masks. Besides, the word "motive," which means a propelling power, should scarcely be acceptable to those who believe in undetermined action of the will—whatever that may mean. For if motives are agents forcing the will, then it is not

free even although the motives happen to be of a spiritual kind. When we come to consider life as a magnetic field—the field of temptation—we may discuss the relative freedom of the human will. To talk about absolute freedom appears to be equivalent to talking nonsense. There can be no such thing anywhere or in anybody, however dogmatic this statement may sound. Meantime, we agree with those writers who think that the problem of the will and of motive belongs not to moral science but to psychology. In any case, the pursuit of “free will” has proved itself to be a pursuit of a will-o’-the-wisp. Even Saint Augustine and Luther abandoned it. The moral problem begins with the nature of the moral act, and the quality of that act depends on the feeling or spirit in which it is done. We shall see later why, owing to this fact, morality in its highest form is, according to our own view, an expression of æsthetic emotion. Aristotle, who was probably the wisest of all Hedonists, although he might resent the compliment, said that a man is not virtuous unless he takes pleasure in virtue or noble deeds.<sup>1</sup> He tells us that virtue has to do with feelings, and that there is no reason why pleasure, if it consists in moderation and the pursuit of noble ends, should not be considered as the chief good.

<sup>1</sup> Peters, *Nic. Eth.*, I. 8 (12).

This already prepares the way for an æsthetic basis of morals. In fact, like Plato, Aristotle identifies the good and the beautiful. Later thinkers like Shaftesbury and Herbart made Ethics a branch of Æsthetics. Unfortunately the word "æsthetic" now suggests merely a taste for the fine arts, and the category of taste seems insufficient to cover ethical activity. Moral action is dynamic. Nevertheless, since "æsthetic" means originally sense perception it involves feeling, and feeling may be of different depths and grandeur. The expression "æsthetic" requires some fresh oxygen poured into it, for without what it stands for human life would become a wretched thing. It is precisely the element of beauty and harmony which must never be absent from great human effort, and conduct is the greatest effort of all. According to Aristotle the end and aim of virtue is what is noble, but since what is noble can never be ugly, the highest conduct is the manifestation of an æsthetic emotion. Even the Greek word for "honest" is the same as the word for "fair" in the sense of "beautiful," and the two words "beautiful" and "good" became fused, almost telescoped as an expression for the Hellenic ideal.<sup>1</sup> It is, besides, interesting to note that our own words "disgraceful," "ignoble," and "unfair"

<sup>1</sup> Καλοκάγαθία.

imply the negative statement of the same theory of the æsthetic character of the highest conduct. "Disgraceful" is what parts itself and falls asunder from grace, and grace is refinement and beauty. In the same way the "ignoble" is what is divorced from the "noble," the "unfair" from the "fair," and in Old English the "fair" meant what was courteous as well as lovely. Socrates said that virtue is knowledge. We almost suspect that it is a kind of good breeding, which, however, is not the exclusive possession of high rank. The word "nobilis" itself meant originally "one who knows" (*noscere*), and especially one who knows how to act on the principle *noblesse oblige*. In one of the Letters of Saint Paul there is a passage which sounds like a reminiscence of his contact with Greek thought, for there can be no doubt that he had a Hellenic, or perhaps more accurately a Hellenistic as well as a Semitic training. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Apart from the intensity of utterance the doctrine might be the doctrine of the Hellenic thinkers who said that beauty and goodness are one. We hold that the

moral act is the act of him who turns away from what is ignoble and disgraceful and unlovely as an artist turns away from what is ugly. But, as we have admitted, such an attitude involves something more than offended taste. *Gefühl ist alles*, said Goethe. But feeling is kinetic. The feeling of moral indignation, for instance, has the energy of a wave, and may burst like a flood. Since, therefore, there may be *dilettanti* in morals as well as in taste, we add that moral action involves a certain pride and disdain. Not, indeed, pride as arrogance, nor disdain as insolence, but disdain which means "thinking it beneath one's honour," and pride in the sense of that *fierté génèreuse* which, according to Montaigne, should belong to every human being. So that in its finest form the moral effort is *la délicatesse des délicats* in all human relations.

It might be objected that the word "*fierté*," which means pride, betrays its savage origin, and comes straight from a Latin word *ferox* which means fierce and wild, and that "pride" comes from an old Saxon root which means much the same thing. The answer is that language itself is thus a witness by its own increasing refinement to a corresponding change in human nature. We take old words and give them finer meanings. But it may also be asked, "If mankind have risen from

such a low layer of animal life as your earlier pages imply, how could they have developed the sense of morality or of beauty at all?" The reply is as follows. It is no more surprising that mankind became "moral" as a result of reciprocal discipline than that their taste improved in comparison with their barbaric beginnings, or that the art of delicate cooking succeeded the consumption of raw flesh while the secret of fire had not yet been discovered, or that complex languages arose out of the primitive speech of early tribes, or that vast systems of Law can be traced to the simple customs of village communities, or that elaborate music replaced tom-toms, or that the science of mathematics originated in the counting of fingers, in other words digits, which marked the first stage of arithmetic, and made possible the calculations of modern astronomy.



## CHAPTER VI

### AN ÆSTHETIC OF MORALS

AN Æsthetic of Morals if it has any value should be able to stand the test of being applied to particular moral acts. In what sense, therefore, can we say that just action, for example, originates in an æsthetic emotion? The central conception of justice appears to lie in what Proudhon called reciprocity, and reciprocity means, roughly, placing human beings on an equal footing. But in that case the rights claimed would also require to be equal. For if one man had a legitimate claim to more land or goods than another, to place both men on the same footing would obviously be an act of injustice. What we mean by justice is, then, the discovery of the proper equation between legitimate claims and corresponding rights. The just man accepts only his share, the unjust demands or enforces more than his share. But a man may be just and yet mean. He may act within the limits of the code of legislation and yet transgress the unwritten law of noble and generous dealing. If a grocer weighs out a pound of sugar and removes every single grain of overweight

until he is satisfied that there is not even a hairs-breadth of unevenness in the balance he could not be called either dishonest or unjust, but he would be considered contemptible. There is a French law which protects salesmen and saleswomen engaged during cold weather in selling goods out of doors. If the thermometer measures a certain degree of cold the sales are to be abandoned, and the sales-people are to be allowed to go indoors. Suppose that an employer, anxious only about his obedience to the law, watched the thermometer persistently until the mercury had fallen to the prescribed degree, and only at that moment recalled his shivering assistants, his action, although strictly legal, would be considered despicable. A less selfish employer, forgetful of his own interests, would have abandoned the outdoor sales long before the thermometer had registered zero. Acts, therefore, that are legal may offend human sentiment, and even bare justice does not satisfy it. If an honest tenant in arrears with his rent begs for time but it is refused him, and he is evicted, his landlord, although within his legal rights, would be condemned by all people of good feeling. This intrusion of sentiment in affairs of profit and loss signalizes the fact that justice itself may cause resentment in humane minds, and that something else is needed. This something else is equity, which

is law correcting law in order to prevent a general rule or principle doing harm in a particular case. If, for instance, a litigant is content to accept less than his due because he recognizes that the opposing party would suffer too much when pressed to pay in full, he is called an equitable man. Equity is generous justice. Something resembling an emotion has entered the case. But this brings us to the conception of magnanimity, so that we have already quitted the severer, colder atmosphere of a law court with its purely legal discussions, balancing of rights, and cautious search for equivalence. The Greeks raised temples to the Graces to remind themselves that there is something even finer than justice. Equity is the smile on the stern face of Justice. It is Justice in æsthetic robes. It implies magnanimity, and magnanimity is emotion. So that even cold Justice has its "æsthetic revelation." If, in Shaftesbury's admirable phrase, there is such a thing as moral architecture, the building must appeal to the sense of beauty. Thus if there is to be a search for motives we maintain that the highest moral motive is æsthetic in the sense that moral energy is beauty in action. It may be admitted at once that such a doctrine is an evangel for the few, and that the morality and religion overshadowed by pains and penalties must remain the guide of life for the many.

In the art and science of living as in every other art and science the highest achievement is the rarest. In the ascent of the moral pyramid the space grows more and more restricted as you approach the top. The moral life begins when the morality of the herd has been left behind. Or rather the moral life ends because a code and catechism have become superfluous. Ethical action has nothing to do with the neat calculations in the small change of give and take. It finds no proper expression in a writer like La Rochefoucauld, whose maxims are chiefly the fruit of prudence. The ancient advice, "Treat your enemy as if one day he might be your friend, and your friend as if he might one day be your enemy," is arresting in its worldly wisdom, but such a precept betrays the low level of calculation in which the finer moral sense becomes strangled and asphyxiated. It suggests that "moral miasma" which, according to Joseph de Maistre, envelops human beings whenever they come too close to each other. The average morality of mankind was ridiculed by Nietzsche as "slave morality," and the reproach may be deserved. But the conception "Jenseits von Gut und Böse" was already expressed in China more than two thousand years ago.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche proposed the antithesis "vornehm" and "verächtlich" instead of "Gut und Böse."

Why, then, should I not tell lies? The lie is a form of parry and defence, and finds its counterpart in nature in the cunning of animals engaged in thwarting each other. In the human struggle why should we not make use of all the kinds of cunning, articulate and inarticulate, which have been invented apparently for the same reason for which the wolf was made wiser than the sheep and the fox than the fowl? Human society is as full of falsehood as nature is of ingenious craft, and the lie is an attempt at survival, a subterfuge in an awkward and dangerous moment—in fact, a mechanism of escape just as the wings of a bird are a mechanism of escape. Why should I not protect myself by misleading my enemy if to tell him the truth would mean my own annihilation? We have seen that there are cases in which falsehood would not be considered wrong, especially when the falsehood brings no advantage to the individual responsible for it. But in the ordinary affairs of life it is judged as wholly wrong although, when pressed for an explanation, moralists appear to be able to reply only that it is wrong because it is wrong. In our own doctrine, which is that the moral effort is the desire for beauty in action, the reply is clear. The lie should not be told because it implies cowardice, and cowardice is ugly. It implies fear of someone, and that is ignoble. We hand over

to the casuistry of the idealists the case of a diplomatist lying on behalf of his country. But in ordinary experience we believe that the only reason why a falsehood should not be told is because it is below the conduct of a gentleman. It is a legitimate weapon of defence for him if he considers himself merely as a creature struggling with others of his kind on the level of nature. But as a result of a long process of refinement pride has entered his character, and pride is a good root of ethics. In all his difficulties, in the face of all his problems, the being whom we are trying to define will turn away with æsthetic disgust from every sort of lowness just as the artist turns away from every sort of ugliness and the man of culture from every exhibition of bad taste. It is the difference between the person who has had a bath and the person who is still unwashed. Our moral aristocrat will notice that human beings, like plants, suffer from fungoid attack, from moral mildew and leaf-spot, and if he discover any such growth in himself he will cut it away root and branch. But he will never be a moral wiseacre, any more than the real man of intellect will ever be guilty of intellectual snobbery and arrogance. It is a man's good fortune to be born an artist in morals as in music. Those who have got beyond the moral struggle and for whom the system of restraints

and safeguards in human society is now unnecessary will judge with magnanimity the great mass chafing in their moral shackles self-imposed or imposed from without. The criminal is he who is still morally in the state of nature, ethically naked and unashamed. He refuses to enter the orbit of civilization. But civilization must crush him because it cannot tolerate disorder within its precincts. In nature all sorts of lives are stolen every hour, but in the human world the collective will, which happens to be the stronger, holds rape and rapine in check, and erects gallows. And after all, crime is committed chiefly by the impecunious, the mentally, morally, and physically wretched suffering from unsatisfied hungers of every kind and often from hereditary lesion. Shakespeare expresses part of the truth by the mouths of the two murderers in *Macbeth* :

“ *Second Murderer.* I am one, my liege,  
Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world  
Have so incensed that I am reckless what  
I do to spite the world !

“ *First Murderer.* And I another  
So weary with disasters, tugg’d with fortune,  
That I would set my life on any chance  
To mend it or be rid on’t.”

It is easy for the opulent, all warm under their eiderdowns, who have never known hunger and thirst, to feel shocked by the rough, rude claims of

those who are maddened by the gangrene of poverty. And it is easy for the prison chaplain to offer moral advice which, in such circumstances, is both well-meaning and meaningless. All latitudes have their platitudes. The moral confusion of humanity has its origin outside humanity, and is only a form of the vaster confusion of nature and fate. Who will adjudicate on the myriad influences of a biological and hereditary kind which have converged in a single degenerate human being? Who can make an expert examination of the great Day Book and Ledger of Nature, and clear up her debit and credit account? Who will estimate her floating debt or audit her balance sheet? The individual who may have reached the level of moral theory and practice which we have endeavoured to sketch must look on moral failure with eyes different from those of a policeman or of an average Bow Street magistrate, since in the case of such functionaries the inquiry into causes lies outside their province and probably their capacity.

In view of the antagonism between egoism and altruism or the instinct of selfishness and of self-sacrifice, it has been said that "morality is profoundly unsatisfactory." The reason alleged is that it involves serving two masters, oneself and one's fellows. And it is true that exaggerated self-sacrifice



mutilates the self as much as exaggerated selfishness. It is obvious that even in order to be useful to others we must spend time and money on ourselves for purposes of self-culture. It has, therefore, been asked "whether there is not a hidden root of insincerity and hypocrisy beneath all morality?" (Taylor). This appears to be extreme and unfair. The mere attempt to subordinate the claims of the self to the claims of others is a sign of the human desire to moderate the more ruthless methods of nature. There is help in the Herbartian view that the ethical effort is an attempt, often successful, to introduce harmony between opposing wills. The long struggle upwards from the predatory level is surely impressive, especially since, as Aristotle says, "it is difficult to be good." But goodness exists, and there are heroic elements in human history. Bismarck said that the world is full of nothing but juggling and hypocrisy, but that statement could not have been made unless some standard of higher conduct also existed as a means of appraisal. Bismarck also said that lies are such current coin that the best way to mislead people is to speak the truth. In other words, truth remains the touchstone. No doubt altruism exists precariously in a scene given over almost wholly to competition because it is a prolongation of the scene in nature where the pre-

vailing selfishness creates a feeling of disgust in the sympathetic spectator. The queen bee which emerges from the chrysalis earlier than her neighbours stings to death all her sisters still asleep in the larval stage, then mounts into the air for her nuptial flight only to return to the hive in order to prepare the new generation. In the pages of Fabre we see at work the diabolic instinct in all insect life, and when, for example, he describes the habits of the golden beetle he compares them to the methods of killing carried out in the slaughter-houses of Chicago. The doings of the sphex wasp, the spider, and the cigale are, indeed, not really different in quality and in aim from the doings of human vermin who likewise sting each other in the dust. Nevertheless, we cannot accept the views of Hobbes and Helvétius, according to whom every human act is only an expression of self-interest. This is not even true of animals, because although they destroy each other, they frequently, as we have seen, sacrifice themselves for the sake of their offspring, and sometimes defend even other members of their own species. It seems puerile to explain all sympathy as merely the effect of imagining ourselves in the same situation of peril or need, or to suppose that, for instance, human love has been fully defined by the remark, "Aimer, c'est avoir besoin." The sense of sympathy is not only

quickened by the sight of suffering. It goes in search of it. The Roman Catholic priest Wintz spent more than thirty-six years in Senegal in districts where small-pox, yellow fever, and leprosy were raging. He was himself smitten by leprosy, was brought home to France for treatment, and his condition improved. On learning, however, that his successor had died of leprosy, Wintz begged to be allowed to replace him; his request was granted, and he returned to the scene of his humble and magnificent labour. It would be shameful to describe such action as the result of self-love, and it would also be absurd. The amount and the quality of our sympathy must, of course, depend on the volume of our feeling. The best human effort demands an æsthetic to reduce ugliness and an anæsthetic to reduce pain. We may be told that it is by struggle and pain that human character is developed, and that too much leisure and too much pleasure create degeneration. It all depends on the kind of pleasures chosen. It is true that Nature frequently presents us with a pair of beggarly alternatives, but it is no part of our task to attempt to solve her contradictions. We rather suspect a philosophy which is able to account for everything, and is in possession of a strait-jacket for all awkward and recalcitrant facts. It was the method of Comte and Hegel. But the contradictions and the awkward,

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inexplicable facts remain, and the moral problem is itself perhaps the most striking proof of the confusion. It is certainly noble "to live dangerously," and endurance creates character, but not the endurance of a bullying "Will to Power." For power is seized either by a single despot or by an oligarchy who only extend and intensify that "slave morality" which it is precisely the aim of the doctrine in question to abolish. Besides, if every human being were engaged in the struggle for power the world would become even more chaotic than it is. The "Wille zur Macht" involves an intellectual and political sadism, and in fact sadist instincts appear in parts of the work of Nietzsche. We prefer to remain in the company of Marcus Aurelius, who said that gentleness is a sign of virility. The doctrine of the superman in its Prussian guise has led to tragedies such as the following. On the 12th of October, 1918, at Marchienne-au-Pont in Belgium, a beautiful little Belgian girl named Yvonne Vieselet came out of school at lunch hour, and she was carrying her luncheon with her, which consisted of one or two cakes. She was attracted by the sight of some captive French soldiers who were being marched by a German sergeant into a courtyard which was immediately closed by an iron gate. The little girl gazed on the weary prisoners, and then suddenly in

one of those beautiful spontaneous actions of childhood she passed her cakes through the iron bars into the hands of the prisoner who was nearest to her. The German sergeant without a moment's warning shot her dead. The Belgian nation raised a monument at Marchienne-au-Pont to the memory of Yvonne Vieselet.

There are moments when the apparatus for moral measurement breaks down before the blind brutality of the forces of life. In these circumstances the bakers and pastry-cooks of optimism can do little for us. Yet in spite of the element of horror in human history, even the pessimist if he is intellectually honest and fair cannot deny that a certain process of moral refinement continues obscurely. For if there were a history of angels, many human beings should find mention in it. Why did Spinoza, who was extremely poor, refuse to accept the fortune which his friend<sup>\*</sup> De Vries desired to bequeath to him? Because De Vries had a brother, and Spinoza being a moral aristocrat would have abhorred himself if he had even been tempted to take what belonged to the natural heir. When the brother very creditably insisted that Spinoza should accept an annuity of five hundred florins, Spinoza, a Jew, not to appear ungracious, agreed to receive three hundred. There was magnanimity on both sides,

and, as we have seen, magnanimity is so supreme a virtue that it makes even the precautions of justice unnecessary. The act of Spinoza was a moral act issuing from a feeling of the need of *les règles de la bienséance*, the rules of decorum. In *A Winter's Tale* Shakespeare expresses the matter humorously when he makes the old shepherd say to his son, "We must be gentle now we are gentlemen." Why, again, did Spinoza reject with scorn the bribe of a thousand florins offered by the Synagogue if he would, by occasional attendance at the services, cause people to believe that he still adhered to the religion which he had actually abandoned? The answer is again obvious to that and to the next question, Why did a philosopher who was so poor that he depended for his daily bread on polishing lenses for opticians refuse the pension which Condé in the name of Louis XIV offered him? It was because his æsthetic sense of what was fitting and noble prevented him from becoming a parasite on a king whose armies had invaded Holland. What other rule than this is required for conduct? We propose, therefore, the maxim "Act Nobly" as the vade-mecum and talisman for daily experience. Such a maxim is not only briefer but more practical and more universal than Immanuel Kant's. The reader may remember that Kant advises us to act in such a way that the

principle of our action could immediately have the force and value of a general law. (*Handle nach einer Maxime welche zugleich als ein allgemeines Gesetz gelten kann.*)<sup>1</sup> The suggestion is stimulating and striking, but it breaks down in practice. We have already seen that conscience, which embodies Kant's moral law, is not an infallible guide, and that conduct which might be considered right in one case would be considered wrong in another. So that there is no universal ethical standard unless we content ourselves with vague generalities out of relation with life. Even Pascal pointed out that moral ideas change with the climate. Even Bishop Butler seems to admit that our own well-being is an obligation and that if a conflict took place between conscience and self-interest, conscience might require to give way. He considers the dilemma unlikely, but even the admission of a possible impasse shows that there is no fixed, unchanging law of universal application. In Europe suicide is judged to be immoral in certain countries, whereas in Japan it is considered to be a moral act. A Samurai who refused in a given case to follow the ancestral custom would have been judged immoral because he had infringed an established rule of behaviour. Everyone will agree that the Stoics reached a high level of moral attainment,

<sup>1</sup> *Metaphysik der Sitten*, p. 25; Leipzig, 1870.

but they found suicide justifiable. They defined it as "the way out," a sort of emergency exit. Men like Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius agree that at any moment suicide might be a necessity in the case of this or that human being. In the century before Kant it was shown by Pascal that moral ideas are an affair of latitude and longitude. "Trois degrés d'élévation du Pôle," he says, "renversent toute la jurisprudence. Un méridien décide de la vérité." He adds that "the joke is" (*la plaisanterie est telle*) that there is no universal law, and that we have no instruments fine enough to discover justice and truth. But the rule "Act Nobly" does not require any instruments for its application except the emotion of the individual. It does not depend on any calculation, and it does not change with the climate or the circumstances. It seems to satisfy Kant's demand for a universal maxim and to be capable of replacing a supposed unerring conscience. It gives expression to a spontaneous feeling—if you happen to have the feeling. The fact that moral action considered as an æsthetic need is rare is no reason for renouncing it as an ideal. If a guest in a country house during the momentary absence of his host discovers that his host's wife entertains certain feelings towards himself and that he reciprocates those feelings, why should he resist the temptation?



Given his own wavering and distress it is obvious that, judging the situation merely on the plane of nature, nature means him to succumb. Why should he refrain? Because such an act of treachery, and especially at such a moment, would be ugly and ignoble and ignominious, and "ignominious" means "not to be named." Ethics is a branch of the science of beauty. The purest mind allows itself to be stained only as glass is stained with fine imagery. Or rather it is self-illuminated. It is its own lodestar as well as lodestone.

We noticed that it is from the vocabulary of morals that words are borrowed for the purpose of describing religious qualities and states. But religion itself makes use of æsthetic description in order to express its own emotions. One has only to remember the language of the mystics, men like Eckhart, Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint John of the Cross with his *incendium amoris*, to become convinced that in the last resort even moral terminology is found too bare, and gives way to poetry in moments of religious tension. There is "the *beauty* of holiness." The word "holy" is just the old English word *hāl* which means *whole*, *unbroken*, as well as *hale*, that is to say, *robust* and *strong*. Holiness is haleness. It is an æsthetic conception.

The moral categories begin and end with man.

They cannot, as Aristotle pointed out, be applied to the gods. It would be insulting, he says, to attribute qualities like temperance and courage or even liberality and justice to the divinity. What he means is that such attribution would involve the prolongation into the supernatural sphere, where perfection is supposed to reign, of those virtues which have value only because they help to improve the imperfect world of man. But a perfect being knows no temptation. He is never in any fear that he may fail and fall. So that, paradoxical as it may sound, it is the absence of morality or of the need of morality which marks the moral advance. Conscience ceases to be a kind of moral ready reckoner. For this reason it has been said that "it is a moral duty to be non-moral" (Taylor). Such a statement seems dark and juggling only to those who have never reflected on the fact that the need of "morality" betrays a chaotic state of human nature. To be non-moral does not mean to be immoral in the conventional sense. It means only that the dilemma between good and bad, right and wrong, has disappeared. Something of the freedom and the independence of art has taken the place of a struggle which resembled a kind of spiritual penal servitude, and penitential psalms have given way to spontaneous song. When Spinoza said that "repentance is a virtue unworthy of a man" he

meant that the good man never does anything of which he need repent. There are some kinds of praise which are an insult because they indicate only rudimentary achievement. Certain forms of approval which might gladden the heart of an apprentice would offend a master craftsman. No one, for example, would venture to inform a supreme artist that his drawing was correct. In the same way, just as a human being conscious of his own uprightness would object to be called "a respectable person," we might imagine a Supreme Being resenting the compliment "good."

Men like Eckhart and Saint Francis of Assisi after they had inhaled the pure ether of ecstasy were no longer troubled by what we might call the detective element in religion. They had got beyond good and evil. If Saint Francis, the greatest of the Christians and also an æsthete, were alive he might join the Salvation Army because of its admirable insight into the psychology of the wretched. In any case, no matter what our moral or religious aspirations happen to be, we should be able to sign the haunting creed of the great Pagan minstrel—

"To hold a hand uplifted over Hate,  
And shall not loveliness be loved for ever?"<sup>1</sup>

This is the true *vox humana*. Here all that is best in

<sup>1</sup> Gilbert Murray's rendering.

the moral life finds an æsthetic expression. Beauty is truth, truth is beauty. The highest kind of ethics is a sort of spiritual *savoir vivre*. It seems to us that the quaint remark of Thomas Dekker that Christ was "the first true gentleman" is of far greater importance than the Athanasian Creed, and at least it is intelligible. After all, the great Galilean did not say, "In my Father's house are many Police Stations."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PURSUIT OF PLEASURE

THE most revolutionary of modern thinkers said that his thought was like a dancer.<sup>1</sup> But thought should be rather a diver than a dancer, and a good diver fears the shallows, not the depths. Unfortunately the human mind does not possess any real depth-measurer, any bathometer capable of bringing up authentic news *de profundis*. We ought, indeed, to be impatient with the inspection of the mere surface of things, but, on the other hand, the power of discovering ultimate meaning has been denied us. We do not know if any ultimate meaning exists. All that we may do is to attempt to understand some of the causes at work in the world of our own experience. We have seen, then, that innumerable forces, organic and inorganic, crowd behind us, beneath us, and around us within the great frame of nature, and also within that narrower frame of civilization which we have superimposed upon nature, but whose continuance can never be

<sup>1</sup> "Mein Gedanke ist wie ein Tänzer." In his case it was often a dance of St. Vitus.

guaranteed. We glanced at the insomnia of the universe and at the insomnia of human history, which is only another but more poignant expression of the universal unrest. We found that there is no justice in nature, which is a perpetual scene of pillage and massacre, and that although justice does exist in the world of humanity it exists precariously both between individuals and between States. Justice, which should be the connecting rod in all human relations, frequently breaks down, and not an hour passes without the committal of some unjust act. If the savage is a potential citizen, the citizen is a potential savage because the underprops of civilization might gradually or even suddenly fall away, and there would be a relapse into barbarism. Just as an earthquake lasting a whole year might shatter the globe into fragments until the seas covered it, so a social upheaval on a universal scale might wreck human society into splinters. Civilization is like a house built on volcanic soil, and all premisses are only temporary premisses. In the eye of eternity the human encampment is a brief bivouac on a stricken field. To a lonely thinker it seems strange that the vast majority of his fellow beings never seem to be haunted by the enormous enigma of existence. The enigma remains the same whether we examine the meanest things or the

mightiest ; whether we look at starfish or at stars ! Engaged, however, in the hunger struggle and in the push and jostle for the prizes of life, we have little time for meditation on the meaning of the scene that surrounds us. Our energies are used up in the effort to balance our own private account of profit and loss, and the conception of human life as a market-place and money exchange dominates our minds.

Let us turn, therefore, to this smaller world of the individual, for, after all, it is our own internal experience of sensations, desires, hopes, and fears which really absorbs our attention. We explore and exploit the external scene in order to satisfy the demands of the inner world. Every religion and every philosophy consciously or unconsciously makes man the measure of all things, starts from the heaven or the hell which lies within us, invariably returns to it, and perhaps never really quits it at all. The theatre of the mind is almost perpetually lighted, dreaming or waking, and the self is the sole spectator. What, let us ask, are the responses of the self to the impulsions and the impressions it receives ? What does it desire from life ? And what means does it take to satisfy its desires ?

We found that to the rude hunger that we share with other creatures in the struggle for food there is added a second hunger for all the advantages which

civilization has created. But there is a third hunger, more intimate and secret than the other two, which begins to trouble us early in life, grows with our growth, and accompanies us to the end. It is the hunger for happiness. It is the desire for some form of pleasure, and the desire remains restless, eager, and avid until it enters into possession. Those who say that even if a man were stretched on the rack or overwhelmed by misfortune he should nevertheless be happy if he were good are talking nonsense, whether they are aware of it or not (Aristotle). Disguise the fact as we choose, call it a desire for "well-being" or "the good" or "self-realization," wrap it up in all sorts of hypocrisies, there exists in every human being a craving for pleasure, and he or she is in discomfort till it is appeased. Then, almost as soon as it is appeased it demands renewal. After food, shelter, and clothing have been secured, even after a certain position in the world may have been won, this inward need persists, and gnaws like a rodent for an outlet. It is the result of our ownership of a nervous system as remarkable for its intricacy as for the audacity of its claims. Neither the possession of wealth nor of all the advantages which outward success may bring can pacify this want if the object pursued still eludes the pursuer. If longing becomes vain longing



no quantity of the external upholstery of existence is able to satisfy it. No pain of any kind, moral or physical, is stifled because the sufferer happens to be lying under rich coverlets. Among rich and poor alike there is a demand for an inner *luxury of feeling* ultimately incommunicable like every primary sensation, sometimes avowed, sometimes unavowable, and made up of emotions inextricably interwoven. Go through a vineyard. Observe the red grapes. Look especially at those sides of the clusters which have been turned away from the sun, and you will find here and there a grape that has remained green. It has not only remained green but it is bitter. In the same manner a human being who has never known happiness, or never known enough of it, must find the wine of life sour.

What is pleasure? There are so many different kinds of it, ranging from the vilest to the noblest, that the list is too long to enumerate. And there may be more pains than pleasures, because while pain can be positive it can also be negative. That is to say, the absence of a pleasure causes pain until the void is filled. There are those who, like Leopardi and Schopenhauer, believe that pleasure, too, is really only negative, and means the absence of pain. We shall see later why we cannot accept this view. Moreover, we cannot accept the theory of

Leopardi that pleasure and happiness are one and the same thing.<sup>1</sup> Rather, we believe that pleasures, and especially those of the higher kind, are the stuff of which happiness is made, and that happiness involves balance and unity. On the other hand, pleasures are a perishing series requiring constant renewal. There can be no doubt, however, that pleasure and pain are the two poles of our sensuous experience, and that we are always approaching the one or the other suddenly or by imperceptible degrees. A neutral state involving no sensation at all would be equivalent to death or coma. In the equilibrium of happiness there is a feeling of general well-being expressing itself as a suffused enjoyment unattached to any particular organ. In such a case sensuous experience is like a symphony with subtly blended harmonies, the faculties and capacities co-operating in unison. When Socrates was delivered from his chains he began to rub his leg, and he remarked that pleasure is curiously related to pain, which is nevertheless its opposite. He pointed out that they are never present at the same moment, for, after the chain had been removed, the pain subsided and was followed by a pleasing sensation. Socrates concluded that since even the

<sup>1</sup> "La felicità è tutt' uno col piacere," *Zibaldone*, Vol. I. p. 108 (Firenze: Le Monnier).

gods had been unable to settle the quarrel between pleasure and pain, they had somehow fastened them together—"joined their heads"—so that they could dominate the body alternately. Thus if pain be positive, causing either physical or moral agony, its departure brings relief even although no fresh, actual pleasure replaces it. The relief may be so great, however, that it has almost the value of a pleasure in itself. Condillac, therefore, appears to have been wasting his own time and his reader's when he imagined a being in whom the feelings of pleasure and pain were so sundered that while he possessed the one he could have no idea of the other. On our first appearance in the world at the moment of birth the roots of pain and pleasure are already interlaced.

The common saying that one person's food is another's poison means that what may provide enjoyment for one human being may produce nausea in his neighbour. Let us take a random glance at what are called pleasures. The frequenters of a gin palace or of a bordello could probably find nothing but tedium in the subtle voluptuousness of persons of more refined taste and higher breeding. The coarse fumes of a vile scent would offend the nostrils of those who delight in the perfume of jasmine and violets. When a criminal belonging to the cul-

tured class finds himself in jail, one of his greatest trials consists in having to consume food which gives the utmost satisfaction to the famished vagabond and beggar who may happen to be one of his fellow-prisoners. The boisterous rout of a country fair accompanied by strident negro music and the yells of those taking part in the entertainment would be avoided by lovers of melodious music and slow dancing. There are persons who see no difference between the style of a master of literature and the dull or gaudy prose of an inferior writer. Human conversation is often like a non-intoxicating beverage, and yet millions of mankind spend hours imbibing its insipidity. So long, in fact, as human beings gabble and gobble they will display surprising contrasts in all matters of taste. Some are devotees of the wine god, others of the swine god. A lover of horses turns with horror from a bull-fight where the horse has no chance of saving himself and the bull undergoes torture, and yet a bull-fight fascinates thousands of onlookers. Confucius condemned those of his countrymen who shot a bird on the branch or caught fish in a net, because he said that in the case of birds Nature has provided wings and in the case of fish she has provided fins as a means and chance of escape. The present writer saw on a poulterer's stall at Nice three dozen dead

thrushes marked three francs fifty centimes each, and he spent the remainder of that day angered and saddened.

Thus the feeling of revulsion or of attraction depends on the degree and quality of our sensibility. Increase your sensitiveness in a world such as ours and you inevitably increase your suffering. The divergences in taste at which we have glanced prove the protean character of pleasure so that there is no common basis for comparison and appraisal. Each human being must be considered the best judge of what is capable of affording him satisfaction at a given moment. The perception of the varying values of the objects which produce enjoyment is a matter of education and the level of refinement, and even on the highest levels there are often profound disagreements in æsthetic judgments. There may be as great a difference in the quality of sensation as in the quality of the objects which produce it. Nevertheless, in the case of the primary demands—hunger, thirst, and sex—the differences are less pronounced because physiological affinities are closer than psychological in human beings, and flesh and blood make us all one. Sex, for example, is a great leveller. A member of a humbler class may irresistibly attract someone of higher rank just as a magnet placed on a lower plane than a piece

of iron compels the iron to move down to it. When Eleanore of Aquitaine, Queen of France before she became Queen of England, was in the Holy Land with Louis VII in 1147, she fell in love with a Saracen slave. Love, too, is a form of the law of gravitation. Owing to a forbidden *mésalliance*, sex sorrow has frequently driven to suicide those who were surrounded by all the advantages of wealth and great social position. On the other hand, a humble agricultural labourer may experience emotions of love equal in intensity to those of his lord of the manor. It is only when we go in search of enjoyments other than those belonging to fundamental physical needs common to all mankind that we begin to discover subtle as well as glaring differences in the pursuit of pleasure. It may be that the pursuit of pleasure is often the flight from boredom, but a bridgeless distance separates the artificial paradise and lighted luxury of a fastidious appreciator of the beautiful from the rude recreations of humbler candidates for happiness. Yet in both cases there is a similar demand for some kind of illusion which may help them to escape from the quotidian monotony. In our desire for pleasant surprise and *jouissance* we are like that northern king whose magician in deep midwinter made him see through one window a vision of the gleaming spring, through another the blaze of the burning summer, and through

a third the red autumn vintage, while, all unheard, the December wind kept howling round the palace. Or, in our need of deliverance from the disagreeable and the repulsive, we are like those personages of Boccaccio in the *Decamerone* who, in order to forget the dismal plague which was raging in Florence, selfishly withdrew to the country, breathed its perfumed air, and passed the time in recounting to each other gay tales of adventure and romance. We shall see later that some form of illusion is a necessity, and that no human life can continue without it. Meantime, let us notice that the human race has devised many kinds of evasion. The attempt to get free may assume the form of drink or of gluttony and lust or numerous pastimes, or it may take the form of suicide or the joy of art and the fascinations of the intellectual life, or love or charity or piety or the meditation on immortality as the final and supreme escape.

In the modern world the hunt for pleasure has been possible because a mass of toilers are engaged in the creation of the means and the materials of civilization. The desire for safety is essentially a middle-class desire, but the safety and comfort of the world now depend upon miners, seamen, soldiers, airmen, fishermen, and on innumerable workers in dangerous trades. A certain retribution, however, awaits those who remove themselves too far from

the sterner conditions of existence. It is contemptible to decide to navigate only safe and sheltered waters. A true navigator starts for dangerous and unknown seas. For it is the open sea and storm, fog, darkness, and starlight that are a sailor's best educators. We may seek pleasure in a perfumed and painted world far from the cries of the hungry and angry things of nature, but there are disappointments and disadvantages even in a paradise. It is in the surroundings of affluence and ease that a new cry—"Vanity of Vanities!"—begins to be heard when the spectres of ennui and satiety appear on the threshold. At this point Pascal's searching analysis of the human quest for enjoyment becomes valuable. We accept his view that some form of pleasure is the motive of the actions of all human beings and even of those, as he says, who hang themselves. But we have already noticed that his theory that every sort of recreation is only an effort to escape from the feeling of wretchedness is false. There is a wide difference between those pleasures which are active and those which are mainly passive. Dram drinking is, no doubt, an attempt to shuffle out for a moment from a scene that has become irksome, and relief is sought in enlivenment or in oblivion. In such a case the individual may be said to be desirous of escaping from the burden of the self. In manly sports, however, great courage



and often great skill together with prolonged muscular effort are required, and there is no desire to escape from the self but rather to intensify its own consciousness. Our admiration of Pascal should not blind us to the defects and exaggerations of his psychology of pleasure. Although he mentions hunting he fails to distinguish those forms of exercise which actually develop and increase human energy from those which weaken or destroy it. Riding, running, skiing, climbing, flying, swimming, boxing, and even cricket and football create new kinds of endurance and daring. For such sports heighten the feeling of self-confidence, and instead of implying a negation they imply a reaffirmation of the self. The feats of a man like Bruno Trojani on the snow have nothing in common with the idle diversions of a person who lounges in a café with the object of killing time. The airmen who flew to the North Pole were not flying from the ills of existence. Pascal's statement, therefore, that "we search for happiness and find only misery" is an obvious overstatement, and his conclusion that "man is only a chimera" is a rhetorical embellishment.<sup>1</sup> But in his diagnosis of the restlessness which pleasure

<sup>1</sup> "Nous cherchons le bonheur, et nous ne trouvons que misère et mort." "Quelle chimère est-ce donc que l'homme?" ("We search for happiness, but we find only misery and death. What a chimera, then, is man!") *Pensées*, Vol. II. pp. 11 and 12; Paris: Hilsum.

may cause and of the illusions which accompany its pursuit, especially in its vainer forms, Pascal turns a powerful illuminant on the centre of our lives. Owing, however, to the overshadowing fear caused by his religion, he was anxious to prove that happiness can be found neither within us nor outside of us but only in eternity. It was this attitude which intensified the pessimism of his theory of pleasure, and led him into error. He contrasts mortal with immortal life for the purpose of showing the emptiness and the "perpetual illusion" of the former, but, as we shall see later, this, instead of being a solution, is merely a postponement and prolongation of the problem to be solved. He admitted that he was playing for safety, and the fact is rather surprising, and it is certainly disappointing in the case of a mind of the highest order. Like Saint Augustine he had had personal experience of the life of the senses, and both of those men, with the zeal of fresh converts, turned almost savagely on the world which they had abandoned. In reality they exchanged one kind of hedonism for another. But Pascal remained fascinated by the disorder in human life, and he admitted the inevitable character of the claims of pleasure in a being like man, assailed from within by the desire of it and from without by the allurements of objects

which, at least temporarily, are capable of satisfying that desire. For it is not only that the world is filled with desirable things which offer themselves for our possession, but that when they are absent we desire them even more and go in search of them. Temptation, therefore, is double because it comes from without as well as from within. To choose an example from one of the lower passions. The presence of the fatal bottle makes the dram drinker seize it, and alcoholic excess creates nervous disorders. But nervous disorders, originating otherwise, may actually awaken a desire for alcoholic excess so that a vice previously dormant or non-existent may be the effect of nerve-hunger.

It is on the threshold of adolescence that we become suddenly aware of the dramatic character of human experience and its numerous temptations and its blandishment. As long as the tragic basis of existence lies hidden or is intentionally ignored, life, in the dawn of youth, appears like a beckoning horizon which we approach in the joy and wonder of expectation. The old Teutonic words "beacon" and "beckon" have really the same meaning. They stand for signals and summons by fire or gesture. The beacon gives light and therefore warning, but it may be also a misguider as well as a guide. There are false beacons. A bell is a beacon

of sound ! But there are siren bells as well as siren music, and youth listens for them. At such moments the world seems an earthly paradise. The mortal trajectory has only begun, and the other end of the curve seems at an infinite distance. Oh, what pleasures we shall have known before it begins to drop ! All the signal fires of life are burning, all the senses are awake, and adolescence itself is a waking volcano. In the language of the mystics " the night of the senses " meant the slow purification of the soul, but in the language of youth the night of the senses has a wholly different meaning charged and overcharged with delight. We are touching the eternal Pagan foundations of human life. The soft wave of pleasure rolls sinuously round the shores of youth. But reason can carry on her patient work only in the state of equilibrium, never in the convulsions of ecstasy. She requires to occupy a lodge half-way between intense enjoyment and intense suffering. If invaded and inundated by passion the reason becomes like a ship's compass disturbed by magnetic ore lying in the sea bed. And it is in some form of irresistible magnetism that the dynamics of pleasure reside.

The space around a magnet is known to men of science as " the magnetic field," and in the field of life too we are subject to many magnetic forces till

death demagnetizes us. A piece of metal, iron or steel, drawn onwards by a distant magnet is able to brave other forces in its path and even crosses them at right angles in order to reach, by the nearest way, the stronger power that is compelling it. This is like a picture of temptation which irresistibly draws a human being towards it until the moment of surrender. The line of passion is always the line of magnetism, that is to say, the line of least resistance. It would be both physiologically as well as psychologically true to say that the best way to destroy a passion is to satisfy it and succumb to it. But it is only temporarily true. It is true only by fits and starts. We destroy hunger by eating and thirst by drinking, but these appetites reassert themselves and demand satisfaction again and again. We repeat that the individual must be supposed to know what at any moment can bring him immediate satisfaction. Yet, although for that moment his choice may be physiologically and psychologically correct in the sense that it causes appeasement, it may later be denounced by his reason. For if the choice is too often renewed it may lead to disaster. The line of least resistance sometimes arrives at the precipice. The too frequent resurrection of any sensuous desire ends in the usurpation of the entire character. In

the lower levels of the life of the senses we move between the two poles of satisfaction and disgust. The situation created by passion, for example, is described in the following lines :—

“ Enjoyed no sooner, but despised straight;  
Past reason hunted, but no sooner had;  
Past reason hated as a swallowed bait,  
On purpose laid to make the taker mad.”

If one group of nerve centres be satisfied at the expense of all the others the benign feudalism of health will be overthrown. The ideal state occurs when the body with its various demands is like a series of well-regulated fiefs combined and co-ordinated in their vassalage under the overlordship of the controlling mind. It is, of course, impossible for a single individual to possess all the strongest passions at one and the same time. Otherwise he should be a polymaniac. It is more common to see one sole passion struggling for leadership, and obtaining it. The ultra-hedonists, followed by many novelists and dramatists, err, however, in imagining that average human beings are perpetually obsessed by the craving for a particular kind of sensual enjoyment. At least Don Juan appears to frequent bourgeois society less often than writers of problem plays used to suppose, even although in most civilized countries the Divorce Courts are congested.

The majority of mankind must first secure the means of providing themselves with pleasure, licit or illicit, and the effort to capture those means often becomes itself a source of pleasure. Moreover, as we have seen, pleasure too often repeated becomes its own destroyer, and ends in apathy. The persistent pleasure-seeker often finds that satiety is his last and most dangerous guest.

We contain our own dilemma because the human organism in the course of ages of evolution has become the vehicle of the life of reason as well as of the manifestations of passion. Nature does not intend that we should be passionless. Supposing we accept the view that a spiritual entity is somehow encaged within us and that by an inexplicable process of flight which no one has ever witnessed it is able at death to quit the cage, it seems reasonable to think that such a forced partnership with the flesh is a blunder. It seems equivalent to compelling a healthy person to sleep with a leper. If the "flesh" is the disreputable thing which Saint Paul describes, why should the "spirit" ever have been sent into such a prison? The body, like a heavily mortgaged property, is loaded with obligations which it is forced to fulfil in view of its carnal needs. If we are utterly passionless we cease to be human, and we become of no use in the scheme of nature. But if we have

too much passion we re-approach the carnal level, and become of no use in the scheme of "spirit." In fact, the harnessing together of flesh and spirit seems as clumsy as yoking within the same shafts a thoroughbred and a bull. The human body is made up of the most irritable substances in the universe. The main characteristic, indeed, of all living substance is its irritability in the biological sense, that is to say, its rapid response to a stimulus. Consciously or unconsciously we are being continually bombarded by impressions from the outer world. The word "nerve" originally meant a "bowstring," and bowstrings are apt to break or become weakened when the tension is too strong. Moreover, our conscious experience has its roots and beginnings in the unconscious activity of the millions of cells of which our bodies are composed. Unknown to us those cells may be already the scene of disease. We have the illusion that the brain governs the body. But there are innumerable activities in which the brain is not afforded a chance even of collaborating. Chemico-physical forces are at work in secret throughout the bodily precincts, preparing the conditions of resistance or of compliance which the individual supposes to be within his own choice and power simply because he happens ultimately to become conscious of his own acts. The human



organism is a federation of cells more or less loosely connected, and neurones or nerve unities continue to work independently of the "will" of their owner. In sleep, for instance, and in coma all the natural processes continue in spite of the annihilation of consciousness. What appears to be the result of a purely personal decision has been prepared and made possible by impersonal elements. When those impersonal elements become diseased, consciousness is threatened, disorder takes place, mania may supervene, and the "self" which was supposed to have been the controller is discovered to have controlled nothing. The mere fact that complicated changes in gland cells, muscle cells, and nerve cells over which the mind has no authority whatever precede any conscious act is sufficient to discredit any theory of "personality" which starts by neglecting the foundations. To suppose that we can disentangle consciousness and treat it as a separate existence apart from its cellular basis is to suppose that the surface of the sea has any meaning apart from the depths below, or that a plant could go on living if its roots were cut away. The word "personality" is a convenient abstraction which ignores three-quarters of the facts without which there could be no "person" at all. We have considered hunger in various forms to be the characteristic of human

life, but it is only after the hunger of millions of cells which make up the organism is satisfied that consciousness is possible at all. And let us not forget that each cell possesses its own reproductive and nutritive system by means of which it competes with its neighbours. The battle of life really begins among the cells of our own bodies, and myriad processes of destruction and renewal take place within us. But if this is so it means that impulsions of all kinds which may later affect what we call "character" originate below the conscious level so that the statement "*Il n'existe pas de fatalité intérieure*" is merely absurd. In the gust of passion even the strongest human nerves behave like quaking grass.

We have glanced at the quivering foundations of the human nervous system to convince ourselves that they are scarcely a satisfactory basis on which to build a whole Sinai of Ethics. The undertaking seems to be too pretentious. An animal remains an animal even after you have put it into clothes, and Nature means to retain her clutch upon us. As if to mock us and to make fun of us as moral snobs she now and again reminds us of our very humble physical beginnings. As these lines are being written information arrives that a newly-born infant with a tail five centimetres long was taken to the

Metropolitan Hospital in London. The occurrence is less rare than might be supposed, and such cases happen annually. In the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons there is preserved a caudal appendix some sixteen centimetres in length which was amputated from a child three months old. The inhabitants of certain islands in the Malay Archipelago are frequently born with tails. Moreover, during the Great War surgeons at the Front were surprised by similar proof of the truth of Darwinism in the case of numerous soldiers who had come from all parts of the globe. So that it will be necessary scientifically as well as charitably to attribute to anthropoidal pedigrees the grosser manifestations which still linger in the life of the senses.

Nature needs breeders. She demands an inexhaustible supply of pollen and ovules and every kind of germ plasm for the continuation of species. Her most audacious and crafty contrivance, is the lure of love and of lust with which she beguiles the individual whom she has secured as the means of perpetuating the race. There is an old medical term *febrifuge* which signified a cooling drink for the purpose of driving off fever, but Nature has no interest in cooling the fever of sex. It forms no part of her policy. The question appears to have deeply interested Saint Paul, who, in some respects, might almost be con-

sidered as a precursor of Sigmund Freud. He certainly would have studied carefully the writings of the great Austrian psychologist. For Saint Paul also frequently occupied himself with morbid psychology, and handled even the problem of suppressed sex. "Adultery," "fornication," "uncleanness," "the lust of the flesh," "inordinate affections," "the lust of concupiscence," "lasciviousness," "filthiness of the flesh," "abusers of themselves," "it is better to marry than to burn"—these and similar expressions which if used by a modern writer for the first time would have been condemned as morbid indicate with sufficient clearness that the great Apostle was fully aware of one of the problems of civilization. For civilization depends on the suppression or at least on the control of certain instincts. If he had been alive to-day Saint Paul, who was a man of genius with an intense interest in human nature, would have noticed that no great change has taken place in the habits of the "flesh," which he seems to have studied as if he had been a pathologist. On the contrary, the problem has become more complicated with the growing complexities of modern life. The abolition of polygamy in the Western world probably caused as many evils as it cured. For history makes it perfectly clear that the human race is by nature poly-

gamous. Early society was either polygamous or polyandrous, rarely, if ever, promiscuous. When females outnumbered males polygamy was practised, and when males outnumbered females it was a case of polyandry. Such unions were, as we observe in the customs of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, more or less permanent even when no strict marriage laws existed. Even to-day in Oriental lands there is plurality of wives. Mohammedans are allowed four by the Koran. Hindus may choose as many as they please. In African and Polynesian tribes polygamy reigns. The Mosaic Law prescribes polygamy, and, in fact, "Be fruitful and multiply" is the only Biblical behest which appears to have been obeyed with alacrity. The Chosen People—one has never been able to admire the choice—may have been more or less monotheists, but they were certainly not monogamists. Abraham, "the friend of God," had concubines. King David, whose name figures in an important genealogy, had more mistresses than Louis XIV. Solomon, who was considered to be the wisest man in the whole earth, possessed, according to the First Book of the Kings, seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. So that the celebrated remark of Beaumarchais, that mankind differ from the animals by making love all the year round, seems to be fully justified. Even in

Europe, where harems were abolished, there took place a recrudescence of polygamy among the Anabaptists and in America among the Mormons. By their morganatic marriages German princes became at least bigamous, and those unions were approved by the founders of Protestantism and even by a man like Melanchthon. As European customs became more decorous, however, and owing to the confusion caused by polygamy in the inheritance of property, the system became illegal, and even bigamy was pronounced a crime. Europe exchanged polygamy for prostitution. Two tendencies are visible in the modern world. On the one hand, there is an effort to restrict population, and on the other to increase it. Birth control means that the pleasures of sex may be obtained without the dangers which accompany breeding or the expenses connected with upbringing. But in certain countries the tax on bachelors and the prizes awarded to prolific parents indicate a return to the tribal policy of increasing the population for the purpose of military aggression. In the modern case, however, a single woman in the form of wife becomes, in Tennyson's phrase, "a breeding drudge," a harem rolled into one. Such are the strange confusions which arise within the boundaries of what we call civilization. The truth is that a hidden sexual chaos lies beneath modern life,

and that special difficulties lie in the path of adolescence. The economic struggle, the price of rent, taxation, and the cost of living tend to delay marriage, while natural instincts are suppressed. But the cost of living is moral and æsthetic as well as monetary. A desire which cannot be satisfied honourably is sooner or later driven underground, and may ultimately cause not merely dishonour but disease. The individual sexually starved may have to choose between corruption and corrosion. It may even be that modern neurasthenia and neurosis are the results of the abolition of polygamy or polyandry. These institutions—not to mention Plato's advocacy of promiscuity—might, from a biological point of view and with proper precautions, create better results for the race than those visible under the monogamous system. But no such return, at least in European life and custom, is now possible across the wide gap which separates our ways from the ways of nature. And yet for all we know to the contrary the deep unrest of the modern world may have physiological as well as economic causes. Meanwhile the social dangers attending both the over-stimulation and the under-stimulation of the great primary impulse are obvious to all except to the prudes of both sexes. The twentieth chapter of Leviticus makes appalling reading, but if it be read

along with the passages already quoted from Saint Paul and also with the writings of Freud, supplemented perhaps by the criminal columns of modern newspapers, it will be seen that no change has taken place in the great carnal foundations of human life. It does not appear that nature intends that there should be any change.

Civilization is a vast and necessary prison. For if the prison doors which shut us all in were burst open, and if mankind ranged free and lawless once more, there would be a return to chaos.<sup>1</sup> The war of 1914 revealed the existence of the forces of upheaval and overthrow which may lie slumbering during centuries. The destruction of great and populous cities, of great architecture and works of art, the annihilation of

<sup>1</sup> "Denkt man sich ihre (that is, civilization's) Verbote aufgehoben, man darf also jetzt zum Sexualobjekt jedes Weib wählen, das einem gefällt, darf seinen Rivalen beim Weib, oder wer einem sonst im Weg steht, ohne Bedenken erschlagen, kann dem anderen auch irgendeines seiner Güter wegnehmen, ohne ihn um Erlaubnis zu fragen, wie schön, welch eine Kette von Befriedigungen wäre denn das Leben!"

("If we could imagine the total removal of the restrictions of civilized life, then any man could lay hold of any woman who happened to please him. He could assassinate without scruple not only his rival in the affairs of passion but every other human being who stood in his way, and he could seize property without even asking permission. What a scene of beauty and satisfaction would human existence become!") Freud, *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*, Zweite Auflage, p. 21; Leipzig, 1928.



millions of lives and the mutilation of other millions, the invasion of French and Belgian convents by German soldiers and the violation of the nuns, the large numbers of illegitimate children left behind by the retreating armies and by the armies of the Allies prove that energies of disruption and violence are still massed beneath the frail shell of civilization. But besides the forces which may be let loose by national ambitions, the wilder instincts of mankind, after having lain long dormant, may burst forth collectively in social or religious revolution. The Forbidden becomes like one of those scarecrows which have ceased to scare and on which the crows themselves may be seen ironically perching. Images that were once worshipped are now mocked. When the news arrived in Rome that Germanicus was dead the populace attacked the ancient temples with stones, overturned the images, and cast even their household deities into the street. In their blind anger against destiny they turned even their little children out of doors to perish.<sup>1</sup> During the Russian

<sup>1</sup> "Quo defunctus (*i.e.* Germanicus) est die, lapidata sunt templa, subversæ deum aræ, Lares a quibusdam familiares in publicum abjecti, partus conjugum expositi."

("On the day on which Germanicus died stones were hurled at the temples, the altars of the gods were overthrown; in some cases even the household divinities were flung into the streets and new-born infants abandoned to their fate.") Suetonius, *Calig.* V.

and the recent Spanish revolution almost the first objects of attack were the churches and the monasteries. Altars and ikons were destroyed, and ecclesiastical edifices were set on fire. Such events may be deplored, but the only task of the historian is to discover their causes. Humanity changes little, its subsoil of revolution remains the same. The sudden access of atheism among the Roman populace was due to the obscure suspicion that the gods were impotent, that their idols could do nothing to save the living idol of the people, and that the official religion was a fraud. The sudden access of atheism in Russia and in Spain was due to the same psychological causes, for it was likewise obscurely felt that during centuries the religion of the State had not been on the side of the oppressed but in alliance with the oppressors. The destruction of Catholic pictures and altars during the Reformation, the work of the image-breakers in Scotland, England, and Germany had similar psychological origins. In its search for new gods humanity must always first destroy its old ones, and perhaps in its heart it has no gods at all.

In the case of the individual human being to whom we now return, his moral unrest may find no outward expression but may smoulder in feelings of inner rebellion. It is useless to preach moderation to the

mob, but in his own interests the individual who imagines himself to be suffering from conventional, that is to say, unnatural restrictions may be invited to consider the fact that the rules of "morality," originally framed for the protection of one human being against another, may also be useful as a protection of the single human being against himself. The policy of excess is found sooner or later by individuals as well as by communities to be ruinous. The best gospel is the gospel of moderation. In the life of the senses, for instance, all extremes are injurious. This was one of the favourite themes of Pascal. Too much light dazzles us so that as long as it lasts we can see nothing, but too little light makes vision equally difficult or impossible. Too little sound prevents us hearing anything, but too much deafens us. If a printed page is held at too great a distance the letters are blurred, but they are also blurred if the page is brought too near the eyes. In the same manner, in the region of conduct, virtue, according to the celebrated doctrine of the Mean or the condition equally removed from two extremes, is moderation. That doctrine is still helpful because it shows us that moderation is also the key to happiness. Too great riches are a burden, too great poverty a humiliation. Too much ambition generally ends in disaster, but too little self-assertion makes us

characterless and torpid. It was not till his overthrow that Cardinal Wolsey found "the blessedness of being little." Cromwell said he would rather have been a shepherd, and Danton declared that it is better to be a fisherman than to meddle in the affairs of State. If we consider once more the lower kinds of desire we shall find that the more ignoble pleasures are like those microbes and parasites which prosper only as long as they poison the host in which they seat themselves, and then perish when the host perishes. We are told by naturalists that the vitality of a serpent is increased by a rise in the surrounding temperature. In the same way passion is heightened by a heightening of the temptation. We should warn ourselves that civilized life has not only intensified all the temptations but has greatly added to their number. Because they were nearer to the animals early mankind lived purer lives than modern mankind. It was with the advance of civilization that, for example, the sexual impulse began to overleap the primitive breeding season and became continuous. Hence one of the causes of over-population, and hence also one of the causes of prostitution. In fact, civilization offers aphrodisiacs even to Aphrodite.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE NECESSITY OF ILLUSION

WE allow ourselves to be fatigued by hope as well as by fear, but equanimity lies in the middle distance between the extravagances of both of them. Yesterday's pleasure is as dead as yesterday's newspaper, yet we expect to repeat it to-morrow or to replace it by some new pleasure, and so the series continues until the end. Even in the humblest lives where no costly or elaborate pleasures are possible there is a perpetual looking forward to something better than what the present gives. The truth is that we do not live in the present at all, but always in the future. If we found ourselves suddenly deprived of the power of anticipation our lives would be immediately maimed and paralysed. We might conceivably be able to dwell on the past, but to live merely on memories would be like trying to warm ourselves in front of dying embers. All our energy comes from the thought of the future. The present is only a gangway. If we examine our minds at any moment we shall find that the next moment or the next hour or the next day, perhaps,

is already in our thoughts. The fact that we are almost completely dominated by the future is expressed in Pope's well-known line, "Man never is but always to be blest." The present is here and gone in an instant, and we await all the remaining instants which must also disappear. It is the next event, the new project or duty, the fresh pleasure to be enjoyed or the pain to be avoided which engages either our hopes or our fears. It was, in fact, when "shall" and "will" entered into consciousness that human activity and, let us add, human unrest may be said to have begun. The harvester looks now and again at the setting sun because at sunset it will be time to leave the harvest field. The night watchman counts the hours till the dawn when his watch will be over. The ship's captain as soon as he has left the port begins to think of the port whither he is bound. We are thus led onwards by what a seventeenth-century poet called "the witchcraft of anon." The reader of a book wonders what the next sentence or paragraph may contain, and sometimes glances ahead to discover how the plot or the theme is going to develop. And so it is in the case of the still unprinted pages of our book of life. A magnet acts although it may be concealed, and the future is the powerful magnet which makes us all restless till we reach it.

But when we reach it the illusion which awaits us consists in the fact that the future, which has now become a present, is only a new starting-point for still another future, and so on till death consigns us and all that concerns us finally to the past. And nevertheless without this dubious form of progress our lives would stop altogether because there could be then no motive for continuing. As usual, Pascal expresses in powerful and almost extravagant language this despotism of the future on the human mind, and he is followed by Leopardi, who states even more uncompromisingly that pleasure never exists in the present at all.<sup>1</sup> Pascal shows that the present is never our real aim, and he even adds that it "afflicts us."<sup>2</sup> But, like Leopardi, he is not wholly consistent in his theory of pleasure, for he admits that when the present pleases us we are vexed at its passing. There is a close resemblance between Pascal's and Leopardi's survey of human life, and the one picture is just as dark as the other. Both of those great writers exaggerated the darkness. What is true is that we are already made restless in the present by the future looming darkly or brilliantly before us. But it seems to go beyond

<sup>1</sup> "Il piacere umano è sempre futuro." *Op. cit.*, I. p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> "C'est que le présent d'ordinaire nous blesse. Nous le cachons à notre vue, parce qu'il nous afflige." *Op. cit.*, II. 33.

the limits of truth to say either that the present afflicts us even when not actually painful or that pleasure can be only past or future and can never exist in the instant or series of instants. No doubt pleasure is as slippery as satin. We insure life and jewels but not love nor happiness. No company would take the risk. The effervescence of the life of the senses behaves just like any other effervescence. The cry "Encore ! Encore !" is essentially human, and betrays that the pleasure which we call for once more has already fled like the foam upon the wine. Yet illusions can be recaptured, and an illusion is real as long as it lasts. It may even be more real than the reality that surrounds us. We do not find the fact that the present always gives us the slip sufficiently tragic to justify a pessimistic theory of pleasure. Even what we call "reality" has only a relative permanence just like human happiness. To-day the sun seems extraordinarily real as it pours down volumes of heat like a universal blast furnace, but the time must come when its heat shall have been all expended and the solar "reality" shall have disappeared. Time itself seems real but is only a fiction, for it is a mere reckoning of the revolutions of the earth round the sun, and when the revolutions shall have ceased, time shall have ceased with them. On the stroke



of midnight announcing the departure of the old year those who are gathered round the clock imagine that an actual new entity of time distinct from its predecessor is about to enter on the scene, but it is an illusion. All that happens is that the earth keeps changing its position in relation to the sun round which it revolves, and that we make use of the fact for what we call chronology. In the same way we might show that the foundations of other sense impressions are as unstable as the foundations of pleasure. For instance, on the approach of a storm there usually takes place an apparent foreshortening of the landscape, and a mountain or a coast-line which normally seems far away begins to appear nearer as if it had actually changed its position. But it is an optical illusion due to increased saturation of the atmosphere. There are illusions connected with hearing, touch, taste, and smell. If we are sitting in a railway train which is at rest while a train parallel to it begins to move we have the sensation that it is our own train that is in motion. If, therefore, deception is so frequent in the experience of the senses, the reality of illusion or the illusion of reality in the case of pleasure seems all one. Pascal himself makes a striking suggestion which proves, in spite of his own theory, that what he calls the illusion of pleasure does not

affect the amount or the quality of the enjoyment it provides. He points out that if we dreamed the same dream every night without a single exception, such a dream would have as profound an influence upon us as anything that might happen to us in our waking life. So that if a labourer could dream every night that he was a king he would be as happy as a king who was compelled to dream every night that he was a labourer. If, then, the only reality which we really know is some form of feeling, the question of its illusory basis need not concern us.

The action of the future upon us has its counterpart in our own expectation, and expectation is as great a factor in happiness as in hypnosis. Whereas, however, in hypnosis suggestion must always come from without, in pleasure or happiness the suggestion may come both from without or from within. We may desire what is still far removed from us, and we imagine ourselves entering into possession. Thus expectation is like the attitude of a host awaiting on the threshold the arrival of his guest. But if this is so, the theory that pleasure is never positive but only negative, in other words that pleasure means only the absence of pain, must be false. In that case the longed-for guest would be only a ghost, a shadow and simulacrum. According to Jeremy Taylor, Leopardi, and Schopenhauer

only that human being is happy who has least suffering. Their view is that joy, pleasure, or happiness is the appeasement of desire, but since unsatisfied desire involves pain, pleasure is only the cessation of the pain. Thus pleasure is in reality negative so that positive attributes are denied to it. Leopardi defines it as the absence of "displeasure." When, however, he proceeds to define ennui, which is the abhorred vacuum or zero of feeling, he cannot do so without assuming that pleasure is positive and actual. Otherwise it would be difficult to understand how any operation could take place or any difference be felt between two zeros.<sup>1</sup> The facts of feeling make it perfectly clear

<sup>1</sup> "Quindi il piacere non è veramente piacere, non ha qualità positiva non essendo che privazione, anzi diminuzione del dispiacere che è il suo contrario." ("Hence pleasure is never really pleasure. It possesses no positive quality because it is merely the absence or the alleviation of displeasure which is its opposite.") *Op. cit.*, II. 215. But when he discusses ennui he describes it in negative terms as well. "In somma la noia non è altro che una mancanza del piacere che è l'elemento della nostra esistenza, e di cosa che ci distragga dal desiderarlo. . . . Se non fosse la tendenza imperiosa dell' uomo al piacere sotto qualunque forma la noia, questa affezione tanto commune, tanto frequente e tanto aborrita non esisterebbe." ("In short, ennui or boredom is nothing else than the absence or the insufficiency of pleasure which is the aim and object of our lives, or it is the absence of something which helps us to dispense with the desire for pleasure. If mankind were not assailed by their own urgent demand for pleasure in any

that pleasure implies a psychological condition infinitely more complex than what is created by the mere absence of pain. Pleasure cannot be a neutral state without any distinguishing mark of its own. Apart from any other element, degrees of intensity must of themselves create positive qualities. It is not simply the case of an irritated nerve which ceases to be irritated but of a nerve or set of nerves excited in such a manner as to cause new, agreeable sensations. The satisfaction produced by beautiful music cannot be explained as consisting in the absence of cacophony, for it has tonal values which may be analysed and appraised by the critical ear. Pleasure is not the pause between the ebb and flow, but the flow itself measurable in the heightened vitality which, for the moment at least, it produces in the whole organism. If, in the end, pleasures leave behind them a sense of emptiness, this is because the desire for renewal is unlimited and terminates only with the termination of life itself. But pleasures are limited both as regards duration and extension, and are therefore incapable of satisfying a desire which has unlimited pretensions. No pleasure is eternal and none is unbounded, since

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shape, then boredom, which is as widespread and as frequent as it is held in abhorrence, could never exist at all.") *Ibid.*, Vol. I. 114.

the essence of all natural things is to be transient and circumscribed. In brief, the situation is that after a whole series of pleasures has been exhausted the desire remains inexhaustible. This is the doctrine according to which the human being is doomed, in Pascal's phrase, to "perpetual illusion" because happiness is based on prospects instead of on realities. Unable to be supplied with any enduring pleasure the mind takes refuge in one after another, hoping to mask its weariness by variety. At this point Leopardi and Pascal part company. The Italian is not afraid to accept the logical conclusion of the theory that all is emptiness, yet he states boldly that only illusion can make us happy and that happiness consists in ignorance of the truth.<sup>1</sup> The condemnation of life is complete, and the next step is inevitable—not to be is better than to be.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, Pascal attempts to rise from the illusions of Time to the certainties of eternity. We have seen reasons for believing, however, that earthly happiness may continue even after the discovery of its unstable foundations. All refuges are only temporary, of course, but there is sensible advice in "Carpe diem." Moreover, a pessimist

<sup>1</sup> "Eppure io dico che la felicità consiste nell' ignoranza del vero." *Op. cit.*, I. 168.

<sup>2</sup> "L'assoluto non essere giova e conviene all' uomo più dell' essere." *Ibid.*, II. 34.

who writes a book to deny the possibility of happiness is made happy by a favourable reception of his theory, and smiles with pleasure when anyone praises it. So subtle also may the sense of pleasure be that it may even find expression in an indifference to its own pursuit, as in the case of the Stoics, who rose, or said they rose, superior to the needs of sensuous enjoyment, and thus experienced a new happiness of their own invention. Yet since it is impossible to imagine any human being utterly without any form of expectation, even the most frozen Stoic can scarcely have remained indifferent to threatened changes. No mind can carry on its work unless it looks before and after, and provision involves prevision.

We noticed that in the search for happiness the human race has devised many kinds of evasion and flight from the monotonies or the violent ills of life, and that the belief in immortality has been considered not only as the last but purest means of escape. How has this belief arisen? Charron pointed out that it is the most widely spread and the least supported by reason. We may regard it from the psychological standpoint as the final attempt to secure happiness and, we may add, to avoid pain, because this belief has in its historical evolution frequently assumed a menacing form.

Is it not possible that we might find, at least in part, the origin of the notion of everlasting existence in the necessity or habit of the human intelligence to keep continually thinking of the future? We have been conjugating "shall" and "will" all our lives, and we go out of life still conjugating them. Eternal life too is a cry of "Encore!" It seems perfectly natural that, if even so far as our immediate human affairs are concerned, we must always think ahead, we should find it difficult to abandon the habit as life is nearing its close. The belief in an eternal future, containing as it always does an element of fear as well as of hope, looks like a reproduction and prolongation of our characteristic attitude towards our prospects in the present world. It is perhaps the repetition of a constant, settled tendency of the human mind. Pascal, as we have seen, was impressed by the fact that we are perpetually busy with the future, that we make it almost our sole preoccupation, and that the present is as nothing to us. He therefore pronounces our life to be an illusion. It does not seem to have occurred to him, however, that belief in a future life may be only an extended form of the same illusion. Besides, if Pascal maintains that human life is an illusion the admission is dangerous for his own theory. For how can he make mortal illusions the

basis of a belief in immortal existence? He says that man is the victim of his own deceptive powers, *puissances trompeuses*, and that "certitude" can never be attained. It is true that he also says that "grace" comes to the aid of the believer. What is "grace"? It became a subject of so many and such violent theological controversies that in the end there was no agreement as to what it exactly was. Pascal's Church had been rent more than once by schism so that infallibility could be found nowhere. His own brilliant attack on the Society of Jesus proved that deep divergences of opinion existed even among the faithful. So that his own private experience of "grace," whatever it is, can hardly be accepted as sufficient grounds of belief by those who have never had the experience. The truth is that Pascal advances as many reasons for unbelief as for belief. His own mind was essentially and even brilliantly sceptical, and reading the *Pensées* is like reading those arguments for the existence of God which, as Joubert said, only serve to increase the number of atheists. Pascal's premisses are really the same as Leopardi's, and his conclusions should therefore have been the same. But amid all the oscillations of his thought his desire for safety remained fixed, and on his own admission it gave the casting vote. But he takes away with



one hand what he has given with the other. We accept his account of the deceptive character of our knowledge, but precisely for that reason we cannot agree to add, as he does, another storey to the whole illusory fabric.

We find it natural, nevertheless, that a being like man, accustomed to renew his leases and for ever haunted by the future even as regards his earthly affairs, should imagine that in some form or another his life may never come to an end at all. It might even be surprising if he happened to be without that belief. His psychological peculiarities predispose him to it, and in the Moslem religion, for instance, there is promised to believers a material paradise reproducing on a grandiose scale those earthly enjoyments with which they are already familiar. Even in the case of Christians their far purer vision of a future life is conceived as the culmination in supernatural form of the natural desire for happiness. It is hedonism in its highest manifestation. It was only in the hands of those who, as Hume said, "gained their livelihood by it" that the belief in immortality began to be accompanied by serious menace. Mankind were threatened with immortality. But here once more the purely human element betrayed itself, because just as the earthly future in space and time arouses misgiving

as well as joyful expectation, so disaster as well as bliss was given an eternal form. In the course of its long evolution the belief in everlasting existence has probably brought more terror than comfort. It was already possessed by the lowest savage tribes. In its origin it is a savage idea. Now it cannot be pretended that savages had received it by way of revelation or by the exercise of superior faculties of intelligence. The idea of a "soul" lodged somewhere within the body arose out of dreams. In his nightly dreams primitive man was astonished to see the figures and faces of his immediate ancestors, and he was irresistibly driven to the conclusion that those ancestors must be alive. They visited him regularly even in his waking dreams. Hence ancestor worship began to spread, and the whole hierarchy of spirits came into being. The savage saw in his dreams not only the departed members of his own family but the contemporary members of his own tribe as well as the animals he had encountered in the chase, together with his own dogs and other domestic beasts. Thus since one contemporary dreamed about another the opinion gained credence that it was during dreamless spirit that the "spirit" went wandering. A tribesman who while asleep appeared to have been visited by a fellow-tribesman would naturally con-

clude that his own "spirit" could likewise make nocturnal journeys. Division of "soul" from body, and a belief in the hazards of the supernatural had begun. But since primitive man found in his dreams the images of all the animals and the birds he saw in his waking hours, along with pictures of trees and streams, he became convinced that everything in nature had its "spirit" which might do him harm. Hence animal and tree worship. Totemism became a militant creed, and the totem of one tribe might become the enemy of the totem of another. Religious wars were probably the earliest of all. But even trees were feared, and before he felled a tree the savage prayed to it, and implored forgiveness. Some thinkers have emphasized the ghost origin of the idea of immortality, and no doubt primitive, as well as modern people, had hallucinations even in broad daylight. There is also the interesting fact that the shadow cast by the human body troubled and puzzled early mankind. Even to-day certain savages are careful not to allow their shadow to fall on water in case it might be seized by some animal hiding in the depths. This superstition appears to have been a fruitful source of belief in an immaterial object in the form of the shadow residing within the body and capable of departing from it or being drawn from it. We

now know that the shadow is nothing but a shadow, and is never in any danger at all, but the savage would be offended by our scepticism and would probably be made indignant by our unbelief.

It is because mortal life is nothing but scene-shifting that immortality is proposed as the fixed and final scene. It is difficult, however, for the human mind to imagine anything final or fixed. We know of no static conditions, and we cannot conceive of any condition at all which does not contain within itself the elements of change. The question asked by Hume has not yet been answered—"By what arguments or analogies can we prove any state of existence which no one ever saw and which in no way resembles any that ever was seen?" The subtle Scotch philosopher turned Bishop Butler's reasoning very skilfully against the Bishop himself, and concluded that "the physical arguments from the analogy of nature are strong for the mortality of the soul." At the risk of appearing somewhat presumptuous, but with only an eager desire for the discovery of truth, we venture to offer the following considerations in addition to the reasoning of Hume. If a mortal became immortal he should require either to retain his self-identity or to lose it. If he lost it and became an utterly different being there is nothing to be said.

In such a case immortality could have neither any meaning nor any interest for him. His transformation would be utterly unintelligible to him, for he could have no recollection of his past, and therefore no point of reference. It would be like cutting a telegraph wire so that contact and communication would be destroyed.

If, on the other hand, our mortal retained his self-identity he should carry with it all his present faculties with their limitations and imperfections, his knowledge of good and evil, of pleasure and of pain. But in that case immortality would mean a serious and tragic aggravation of his condition, because it would involve the perpetuation of his human experience throughout eternity. Yet it was precisely in order to deliver him from the sadness of mortal memories that the gift of eternal life was to be bestowed. But the new immortal would be branded for ever with the stigmata and marks of the mortal process of which he was one of the results. That process, as we saw, has been taking place during countless thousands of years; and stretches back through savage life and the prehistoric period towards far lower types in the fierce struggle of species. It assumed the form of a biological fatality whereby each generation was inevitably linked with that which preceded it. The

evolutionary process, moreover, involves nameless cruelty and suffering in which the laws of survival operate in favour of the strong at the expense of the weak. Now, let us accept the theory that the origin of mankind is spiritual ; even so, it cannot be denied that the human race has proved itself to be one of the most ruthless and formidable of the great predatory forces—in fact the most predatory and ruthless of all. Therefore, to endow mankind with immortality would be to sanction and consecrate a scheme which has been loaded with cruelty and injustice from the beginning. We leave aside the question of justice or equity or even decency involved in the exclusion from the privilege of immortal existence of all the lower types which had nevertheless assisted in the making of man only to be discarded after the safety of the human species had been secured. Let us suppose that eternal life has been granted only to the being who can properly be called human. In that case heaven—to use the language of the nursery—must have been already open to the lowest, rudest savage whose way of life was hardly to be distinguished from the habits of the beasts surrounding him. We must thus imagine untold millions of savages from the pre-historic world as immortal beings carrying with them, if they retained their self-identity, memories

of the bloody struggle from which they had come. The conclusion would be that no matter at what stage humanity was supposed to merit immortal life, it would be the link between a spiritual world and a world of biological fatality. And the human race alone would have the chance of being immortal only because lower types had been destroyed in its favour. The gastric basis of the partnership between body and soul made it necessary that every human generation should be nourished on the bodies of unreckonable millions of animals, but this seems an unsuitable, incongruous preparation for spiritual existence. The human race has been able to supply candidates for immortality because during thousands of years it has nourished itself on the carcasses of poor beasts. Suppose that the animals were able to express their views on such a situation we might have some startling opinions. We shall be reminded that if beasts were not destroyed by mankind they would over-run the earth, there would not be sufficient food for them, and therefore they would perish of starvation. But to be compelled to choose one of two bad alternatives does not in the least render the situation rational. The mere existence of such an alternative proves the irrational character of the dilemma presented to us by nature. The immortal scene would be thus fatally connected

with the mortal process which from the most humane point of view must be condemned as ugly, cruel, and unjust. The endowment of a carnivorous animal like man with eternal life would be merely an infinite extension of the results of the evolutionary process. Immortality would have an immoral basis. In our next chapter we shall endeavour to explain the meaning which we attach to the doctrine of fatalism. If that doctrine is true and if, as believers must believe, eternal life *cannot be avoided*, then it too is a form of fatality.

Let us suppose, however, that a jury of philosophers decided that the belief in immortality, like the belief in free will, is an illusion, they would nevertheless require to admit that those two beliefs have been vital forces in the history of mankind. Now, can an illusion be vital? Even Spinoza, in whose system the freedom of the human will wholly disappears, acted in the practical moments of life as if his own will and other people's wills were free. The inference is, then, that there are necessary and beneficent illusions? We shall try to explain why we believe that this is true. The word "illusion" (from Latin *illudere*, to mock) generally suggests aimlessness and deception. If, however, we look closely into the lives of individuals and communities we shall find, on the contrary, that illusion is a



great propelling power. It was the spell of the Moslem paradise which transformed the followers of Mohammed into formidable fighters who changed the course of history. Ancient empires—Babylon, Assyria, Egypt—set in motion vast conquering armies in the name and under the protection of gods and goddesses who never existed. When the old mythologies became worn out and threadbare, Christianity offered a new, more helpful myth, and Pagans began to crowd round it like bees round honeysuckle. Then, during a thousand years, European life and thought were troubled and dominated by the belief in the Second Advent of the founder of Christianity, but it never took place. It was all illusion. It was the illusion that he was about to sail for Asia by a western route which made Columbus sail for America. It was a certain spell surrounding the personality of Lenin which changed the Russia of the Tsars into the Russia of the Soviets. In the moral and economic confusion caused by the Great War new illusions are transforming under our own eyes various nations that are expecting a more brilliant future. The illusion that the future may yet bring fortune creates fresh energy in the unfortunate, and the undoubted success of the psychology of suggestion has made life worth living for those who had lost hope. The method consists in

the affirmation of the actual existence, at least in embryonic form, of the conditions ardently desired but not yet realized. Illusion is thus dynamic. It has been the most dynamic factor in the history of mankind. But if it has played so great a part in the world which we know we should not be surprised if its influence has extended far into the world of the unknown. It is precisely concerning the things of which they know least that human beings make the most confident statements. Minute descriptions of a future life, for which we possess no data whatever, have been offered to us, and many creeds contain details of vast matters beyond human comprehension. It is illusion attempting to throw its faint iridescence through the surrounding mist. In the preceding pages we borrowed an image from the science of magnetism, and we described life too as a magnetic field in which human beings may be seen fleeing like steel filings to their lodestones. But the magnetic field can be infinitely extended, and the stronger the magnet the greater its range. So that immortality, also, becomes a lodestone acting at an infinite distance. It may be, as Cowley said, that hope is the most hopeless thing of all, but no one believes it as long as the hope lasts.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE DOCTRINE OF FATALISM

THE modern world should possess a Society for Promoting Pagan Knowledge. We mean by Pagan knowledge the disinterested pursuit of truth regardless of consequences. In the Christian world the search for truth has never been disinterested. On the contrary, it has invariably been undertaken in the interests of settled convictions and foregone conclusions. Creeds are the strait-waistcoats of belief. As if truth can be cabined within a few dull paragraphs! You might as well put into a strait-jacket a bomb about to burst. Bayle observed that even atheism is less dangerous to society than superstition. Persecution, intolerance, and torture had a religious origin. We do not mean to suggest that intolerance and persecution were unknown in Pagan ages. That would be very far from the truth. Wherever a system of belief, religious or political, has been organized, its organizers have invariably barred the avenue of independent thinking. In our own day political intolerance involving the destruction of liberty has again assumed disquieting forms.

But the fact that an opinion is supposed to be dangerous does not prove that it is untrue. In any case, some such effort as that which characterized Greek thought when it was disentangled from Sophism must sooner or later take the place of doctrines which are manifestly undergoing their inevitable decay. We are not referring to Christian ethic, which in its purest form is of value to the world. But minds, like bodies, become bedridden and suffer from bed-sores if they lie too long on the idle beds of make-believe and superstition. Descartes said that the lover of truth should doubt about everything once in his life. Perhaps he should doubt far oftener, since in the admirable maxim of Guyau *si foi oblige, doute oblige*. Scepticism has pleasures of its own, and there is a certain satisfaction in discovering honest reasons for rejecting as false what was once accepted as true. Although there are occasions when incredulity betrays as much ignorance as credulity, there would have been fewer oppressive systems either of politics or religion if average human beings had applied to the doctrines which they were forced to accept the same critical insight and suspicion of which they make use in the ordinary transactions of buying their daily necessities. In any case, it is better to be a free thinker than a slave thinker.

If now we are asked to state an opinion on atheism we reply that you cannot define a negative if you do not know what its supposed positive contains. Therefore we do not know what atheism means because we do not know what theism could mean in a universe subjected to the ruthless process of evolution at which we have glanced. But it is not in the once famous argument from design that we shall find any assistance. The argument from design ultimately falls to pieces because it proves too much. It need not be assailed from without at all because it breaks down of its own accord from within. There is not too little design. There is far too much. Let us for a moment adopt the argument, however, while we admire the equipment of an animal for its own particular battle of life. We observe its powers of sight and of hearing, its muscles, its teeth, its horns or claws, the rapidity of its reflexes, its agility, its beauty perhaps, its cunning and its courage. But here, coming to meet it and to challenge it, is its enemy either of its own species or of another endowed with an even more wonderful equipment, keener eyesight and hearing, more powerful muscles, teeth, horns or claws, still more rapid reflexes, greater cunning and prowess. In this case, too, we must admire the wonderful adaptation of means to end. But the superior endowment will mean the death of

the victim. This dual character of " design " may be discovered wherever we look, and it creates eventually something like a deadlock in nature. Or it creates an interminable process of construction for the purpose or design of an interminable process of destruction. There is as much ingenuity in the one case as in the other. It involves a wavering battle, and at least nothing moral can be seen in it. Instead of throwing more light on the problem of existence the argument from design only increases the obscurity. We discover the same defect in it whether we examine the life of worms or the life of stars. For this double and contradictory " teleology " appears in the inorganic as well as in the organic world. Just as the chief function of certain microbes is to create disease in the bodies of the higher animals including man,<sup>1</sup> so it is the function of certain mechanical forces of the universe to destroy other forces. Stars and planets are struggling to maintain their position in the sky as animals and plants are struggling to hold their places in their respective species. The continued existence of a planet depends on its success, by means of its own tangential velocity, in resisting the attraction of the sun. The fact that its path is elliptical means

<sup>1</sup> Fischer, *The Structure and Functions of Bacteria*, p. 88; Clarendon Press, 1900.

that a temporary compromise has been established between the opposed forces, but in proportion as its velocity diminishes the planet must gradually approach the limit of its existence.<sup>1</sup> The force of gravitation appears to play among the stars the part which natural selection (there is no more convenient term) plays in the organic world. Schiaparelli tells us that our universe is filled with the debris of stars and comets which have succumbed in the struggle. The sudden change of direction of a comet, for example, is explained by the action of superior planetary forces compelling it to take one path rather than another. But in this vast mechanical conflict in the firmament the rival forces are wearing each other down. The minor catastrophes signaled by the fall of asteroids and meteorites are only a rehearsal of sidereal convulsion on a grand scale. Now, we cannot imagine a new universe governed by different mechanical laws so that what we call the force of gravitation acts both as organizer and disorganizer. The repetition of the two kinds of design in which the forces of creation are met by the forces of destruction appears to be the essential fact in the life of the universe, and, at least for us, it prevents the discovery of any final meaning. But

<sup>1</sup> Du Prel, *Der Kampf ums Dasein am Himmel*, p. 200; Leipzig, 1882.

we cannot make statements either of a positive or a negative kind regarding what lies wholly beyond human experience, otherwise we should be guilty of pretensions to infinite knowledge. We can do nothing but guess, but even guessing should take place within the limits of reason.

There are people who seem to suppose that if they state that the only reality is Thought they have solved all problems. The truth is, of course, that the problems remain, and that the situation is made still worse because the spiritual Source from which everything is supposed to be derived becomes responsible for the entire pollution of its manifestation. The capitulation of certain modern men of science in face of the popular demand for some kind of comfort in a more or less uncomfortable universe is merely pathetic. Books are written about the mysterious universe, and public lectures are given concerning the nature of the physical world which involve the abandonment of the foundations of science as well as of common sense. A popular astronomer proposes to take refuge in the Berkeleian theory that *esse* is *percipi*, in other words that all is Thought and that there is no world of matter at all. That kind of idealism is the laziest of all systems of human thinking, and it is very easy to spin abstract theories as a spider spins



its web out of its own entrails. But even the spider secures some actual material mainstay to which it can attach its threads. Those who inform a delighted public that only thoughts exist should be invited to demonstrate the truth of their conviction by running head-first against the nearest stone wall. The present writer finds it quite impossible to believe that his umbrella, his shaving brush and his cat, the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, the murderers of Edith Cavell, a madhouse or a mad bull, cancer and syphilis, a public urinal and the Albert Memorial are all emanations of what, in the language of idealism, is called "pure thought." If pure thought, either in the strictly metaphysical or the moral meaning of the words, creates an impure universe we should prefer to have nothing to do with it. Men of science often make rather sorry metaphysicians, and they should be invited to remain within their own province. Those who busy themselves only with quantitative relations sometimes go strangely astray when they attempt to examine relations which are qualitative. Hopes were raised in theological circles by the introduction into science of the so-called Principle of Indeterminacy, but they were fallacious. The Principle of Indeterminacy means that in the movement of electrons or protons you cannot at one and the same

moment "determine" position and rate of velocity. It was suggested, therefore, that since you cannot predict how the electron will jump it must enjoy "free will." But you cannot predict how the cat is going to jump, so that the cat too must enjoy free will, and the universe is thus even more chaotic than we had believed.

Physicists inform us that the movements of the molecules of a gas are the effects of various causes. Why should it be imagined that the movements of the electrons in the atom or *grains of energy*, as they have been called, can take place apart from any cause whatever? The suggestion seems preposterous. A figure of speech like "free will" thrown into the arena of electrical phenomena explains nothing at all. Why should we accept the principle of causation in one sphere of natural forces only to reject it in another? It seems unscientific as well as unphilosophic to admit such a break in the uniformity of nature and in the action of the laws of kinetics.

The doctrine of the indeterminate has already been refuted by some brilliant thinkers. The indeterminate is either what is not limited to fixed values or what is vague and doubtful. But what is vague and doubtful may become clear and certain on the discovery of its cause. It is a matter of

scientific patience. "At random" does not mean uncaused. Chance and hazard do not mean events that are uncaused, but events whose causes are too elusive or too sudden to be predicted. The laws of causality must act everywhere or nowhere. Nothing that happens either in the sphere of mind or of matter can be uncaused, but its causes may lie hidden awaiting farther investigation. "To prove," as Bertrand Russell says, "that a given set of phenomena is not subject to laws is essentially and theoretically impossible."<sup>1</sup> It would almost seem that the new humble attitude of certain men of science with regard to speculative matters is due to a sudden resurrection of the fear which Pascal admitted he felt in presence of the "terrifying spaces of the universe." "J'entre en effroi," he said. But it was only an attack of nerves, and that has nothing to do with the search for truth.

In these pages we have avoided abstract speculation, and we have clung as far as possible to facts, although we may have taken a long road to find them. Our interpretation of those facts may be impugned or refuted. But the facts remain. We

<sup>1</sup> *The Scientific Outlook*, p. 112; George Allen and Unwin, 1931.

have not invented them. They are at the service of anyone who cares to look for them, to explain them otherwise or, if it can be done, to explain them away. Facts, of course, imply a theory of knowledge, that is to say, some doctrine as to the exact relation between the knower and the things he knows. We do not believe that the exact relation can ever be known at all. There can be no doubt that the simplest statement regarding the external world is already crowded with implications and pre-suppositions. In the perception of an external object it seems impossible thoroughly to disentangle the contribution made by the thing outside the mind from the contribution made by the mind itself. But we do not suppose that anyone outside a mad-house really disbelieves in a world of matter, "brute" or brutal. We are not engaged, however, in metaphysical inquiry, and therefore we are not obliged to concern ourselves with the subtleties of epistemology. We have made use of "facts," which, unless language is nothing but a snare, have probably more or less the same meaning for other people as they have for ourselves. Nevertheless, we are compelled to make clear the sense in which we have employed certain words that have frequently appeared in this survey. Those words are "illusion," "the self," "causation," and "fatality," and they

contain assumptions which we have no right to ask the reader to take for granted.

It may be said, for example, that no one can talk about illusion without implying that something real exists. If all were illusory the statement could not even be made without assuming that there is something real to rest upon. This is true. We are able to say that certain things are unstable because we contrast them with other things which seem more stable and enduring. Some things appear to be permanent while others pass quickly away. But the fact is that we know only relative stability and relative permanence, because in the end everything passes away or becomes so transformed as to be unrecognizable. The brief life of flowers is illusory in comparison with the greater duration of the parent plant. Within a restricted period, therefore, the life of the rose tree seems more real than the life of the roses. But the day comes when the rose tree likewise dies off, root and branch, so that its "reality" has been, after all, of only a very temporary kind. The most aged oak sooner or later falls, and thus its permanence during some hundreds of years in contrast to the perishing leaves which it has produced is only a question of degree. For the duration of the oak is as nothing in comparison with the duration of the earth out of which it has come.

But the duration of the earth is as nothing in view of the continuance of the substance of the entire universe, which, although it undergoes constant transformations, cannot be destroyed. Substance may become extremely attenuated, but whether solid, liquid, or gaseous, or in any other form it must be eternal. Suns and stars may endure for millions of years, but they are only transient accidents in the life of an indestructible substance compared with which they are illusory manifestations. How much more illusory, however, are the appearances on our own globe. One forest after another may clothe the mountain side during thousands of years, and compared with their evanescence the mountain seems eternal. But neither the mountains nor the rocks are established for ever. Rocks were once molten and they may become molten again. Acid can destroy marble. What appear to us to be the hardest rocks were once being folded and crushed like blankets or bed-quilts while the cooling process in the volcanic mass of the earth began. We say "as hard as iron," but in the sun iron is only a vapour. Such facts chosen at random show that all our descriptions of nature are only temporary and provisional. We imagine that we are dealing with what is real, fixed, and final, whereas nothing is final and there are only relative fixtures. This

means that we possess only comparatively stable points of reference within the changing universe, and those points of reference give us the illusion of permanence and reality. Some things seem more real than others only because they have a longer lease of existence and vanish less rapidly. But all is in transit, and sooner or later everything slips its moorings. Terminus has a meaning only for individual things which Nature destroys, but she makes every terminus a new point of departure.

Can the self, then, be permanent? If reality presents itself as a perpetual flux it is difficult to imagine any particular form of it exempt from the same law. We have used the word self as a convenient name for consciousness, and we have no reason for believing that the animals are less endowed with a self than we are, although ours must obviously be far more complicated since our experience is more complicated. But the animals possess memory, and memory is the very essence of the feeling of self-identity. But we do not for that reason suppose that an entity called "the self" dwells within the lower animals, distinguishable from the rest of their organism. We are, of course, familiar with the objections to which Hume's psychology of the self has been subjected. In Hume's system there is no room for a soul or self sitting above mental experience

and co-ordinating it. If we have, it is said, only a series of impressions, the self that unites those impressions cannot be one of them. The power which combines memories cannot be one of the memories. We are almost compelled to imagine the self as a sort of cashier sitting at a desk and controlling outgoings and receipts. But the same problem, although no doubt in a simpler form, exists in the case of animal psychology. It is admitted that numerous animals like the horse and the dog and that birds also have remarkable memories. In their case too, then, there must be some faculty of organization and co-ordination of their mental experience. Are they on that account in possession of a self distinct from the other elements which make up their consciousness? There is no reason to think that the mechanism of memory and of the association of impressions—if we must not use the word “ideas”—differs in their case or that the rise of a more or less obscure consciousness of the animal self does not follow the same process, whatever it is, which takes place in the human organism. Nature, as we saw, makes use of the same physiological methods over and over again. Why should she not make use of the same psychological methods? It seems absurd to deny that a lion, or an eagle, or a horse, or a dog may not be in possession of some sort



of self-consciousness, since all their actions certainly suggest that they are. If so, is the animal self something apart from the arrangement of flesh and blood, muscle and bone and nerve in their case as well as in ours? The problem appears to be the same in both cases although it no doubt differs in intricacy. We have transformed a name into an entity, and we imagine this entity residing somewhere in the brain as a coin lies in a pocket. Courbet refused to paint angels because he said that he had never seen them. Most writers on psychology have been less modest, and have painted an elaborate portrait of the personal pronoun. But the "Ego" or "the Self" considered as units dwelling like guests in the skull are probably merely examples of those "phantoms due to the refractive power of the linguistic medium" of which philosophy has been lavish.<sup>1</sup> In ancient religions even names were supposed to have a separate existence and to form a world in themselves. A man's name was believed to be identical with his "spirit." But the self is only a name for the conscious activities of the individual. It is a form of "verbal machinery" and is a "bogus entity." As we have already seen, numerous unconscious processes take place without

<sup>1</sup> Ogden and Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, p. 96. Second Edition. London: 1927.

which mental life would be impossible, and yet the mind has no control over them. To imagine the self as supreme legislator is to fall into psychological as well as physiological error. It is not a cause but an effect.

But what is a cause? Without the idea of causation all our knowledge, such as it is, would become a mere chaos. We attempt to explain an event by attributing it to a cause or combination of causes even when the actual nexus is invisible and escapes us so that we observe only a sequence. If we notice that a tree is bending and that a strong wind is blowing at the moment we feel immediately justified in believing that the wind is the cause of the tree's motion. Thus an event happens because something else had already happened, and in many cases the relation between them appears to be clear. But what we call a cause has had its own cause. The wind which made the tree bend is the result of to-day's atmospheric conditions, but those conditions were the result of yesterday's, and so on in an infinite series backwards as long as an atmosphere has existed round the earth. But the mass of causes at work within the universe cannot explain the universe. We are led on to the conception of a Whole within which the changes which we partly observe take place, and then we stop. We stop

not because we can imagine a Whole which was uncaused or which could cause itself, but for the simple reason that we have no farther point of reference. A thing that caused itself and had no relations whatever is unthinkable. Therefore as an ultimate category causation fails us. It is only *within* the Whole that it can assist us to sift out the meaning of some of the changes which take place, for instance, in chemistry or biology or politics. What caused the Whole? No answer. There are those who find an answer, it is true, in the idea of Causa causans, that is to say, a cause that caused itself. But if we are perfectly candid we must admit that this conception is unintelligible, at least to the human mind in its present limitations. The stars and the planets are supposed to have been once in a nebular condition. What caused the nebulæ out of which they came? Again no answer. It is like ringing the bell of an empty house. We keep ringing the bell, but the door is never opened. The "Absolute" used to be a favourite word in philosophic idealism, but if it means what is unconditioned and unrelated it is incomprehensible to human intelligence. We may move up from cause to cause as on a ladder, but even an extension ladder has its limits.

We may now turn to the idea of fatality, which

is a popular expression implying the action of external causes on human fortunes. Some people, having dethroned the Deity, put another deity in his place, and call it fate. But it is only a word which meant originally the "fatum" or "decree" of Zeus, and had thus, like all other religious ideas, a human origin. But a philosophic fatalism signifies nothing more than that innumerable causes beyond our control operate within the world of our experience. It is quite impossible to refute this doctrine. If it is not true, then a human being must be stronger than the entire universe of which he forms only a minute, atom-like part. He must be omnipotent, and can control the stars and the winds, life, death, and everything. He would not require to wait for events or to scrutinize the unknowable future. Nothing would be unknown to him. Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, the reverse is the case. We are impotent in the midst of a very potent and mighty mass of causes, and the fact is registered in every religion the world has known. For the basis of every religion has been fatalism. In its ultimate implications Christianity differs in no way from Islam. Omnipotence involves the entire subjection of the individual because there can be no room for a chaos of separate wills where one Will is supreme. In the language of the theo-

logians fatalism was "predestination" and "election." As we shall see in a moment, the teaching of the New Testament expresses clearly the fatalistic theory. Fate is often conceived as a mysterious and usually malignant Power, whereas it is merely a word to describe causes which act within us as well as outside of us. It is not an Entity existing apart from the events which it is supposed to cause. It is a name for the events themselves. It is a label for innumerable happenings and transformations which we call inevitable because we are only the spectators, not the controllers of them. We saw that behind the life of every human being there lies a long biological fatalism, which means that his appearance in the world became possible because a sexual union had taken place between his parents, who, in their turn, were the result of the sexual union which had taken place between their own parents, and so on in an interminable line backwards. Thus our bodily structure, our nervous and muscular systems, our brains and the entire basis of our psychology and our character came to us as the consequence of the action of forces which we call "fatal" because they were operating long before we appeared on the scene of existence. We did not summon them. They summoned us. In the same manner, the level of civilization, the social

status of our parents, their fortune or want of fortune, the religious beliefs in which we were brought up, together with many other factors, formed the "fatal" outward circumstances which influenced our lives long before we could even attempt to react against them. If the circumstances had been different we too should have been different. If we had been born in India we might have been Hindus, if in Turkey we should have been Moslems. This is fatality acting upon us first in the sphere of nature and then in the sphere of human society. It is owing to its action that each of us becomes for a brief period an item in the vast inventory of organic things. No other doctrine can supply an intelligible basis for the science of man.

We mentioned the case of a tree bending before the wind. If the wind becomes a hurricane and the tree is blown down its "fate" is the result of the wind's strength. If the same hurricane sinks a ship and a thousand passengers are drowned we recognize that their fate, too, has been caused by the same irresistible force. The general conception of fatality, therefore, is the conception of superior forces before which weaker forces bend, give way, and disappear. There is nothing mysterious about the occurrence. It is an elementary fact. For purposes of convenience of expression we may call

it a " law " like a law of Physics, a primary principle, a manifestation of the nature of things—anything you choose so long as you do not personify it. Fate is a series of events related with other events which preceded them or synchronized with them. In human history and in daily life the fact stares us in the face. Various forms of human energy collide, and some collapse. One nation overthrows another, one individual sweeps another out of his path, and sooner or later all the weaker forces as well as the stronger are obliterated in death. Moreover, such are the paradoxes of existence that weaker forces may actually be the agents of change. A microbe seems less important than a man, but it may kill him. A monkey bit a king of Greece, and as a result the history of the country took a new direction. The king died, and his death gave rise to a series of political changes so that the fortunes of Greece depended on the action of a monkey. A student killed an Austrian Archduke, and the most appalling war in the annals of mankind broke out as the immediate result of the assassination, and cost millions of lives and immense economic ruin. Pascal used to indulge in playful raillery on the trivial causes, such as the length of Cleopatra's nose, that often mark the turning-points of human history, which is nothing but a chaos of episodes.

The universe itself is nothing but a chaos of causes with temporary adjustments among themselves. For Fate does not mean fixture. It means myriad metamorphosis, and in the activity of the disruptive causes the destiny of mankind may be of no more importance than the destiny of flies in a whirlwind. No meaning or purpose can be discovered in history. A great deal of it is tragedy and a great deal of it is farce. There is only relative meaning within the narrow range of human experience. One state of society, one mode of existence may be better or worse than another. That is all we know, and we attach meaning or meaninglessness to what affects our own fortunes. What has meaning for us might be wholly meaningless to the inhabitants of another planet. The word meaning is itself something of a fraud. We search for the meaning of a word in a dictionary, and we are sent to another word for an explanation, but this other word sends us still to another which tells us to go back to the word with which we started. The vicious circle in a dictionary is a reproduction in miniature of the vicious circle which can be discovered in all human affairs, in knowledge, in morals, in religion, and sometimes in two senses in the pursuit of pleasure. Human history has been a series of cyclones and anti-cyclones following each other in a circle. We



said that the meteorological conditions to-day are the result of all preceding meteorological conditions. As the science of meteorology becomes more exact the state of the weather can be predicted owing to the reports received from distant parts of the earth's surface. If it were possible to devise a meteorology of history the course of civilization, with all its advances and retrogressions, its wars and its periods of peace, could be foretold. Its fatalism could be foreseen just as it is supposed to be foreseen by a Supreme Intelligence for whom there can be neither concealment nor surprise. The task of foretelling the future can never be accomplished not because causation is absent from human affairs, but for the reason that the causes are still hidden and that we discover their effects too late. But if events *en masse* are inevitable and issue out of preceding events the life of the individual cannot be exempt from the operation of the same principle. He is one of the series and cannot be explained apart from it.

An ancient maxim reminds us that the forces of fatality lead the willing but drag the unwilling. Motion and commotion, whether voluntary or involuntary, appear, indeed, to be the essence of reality. For reality is not rigid, but fluid and oceanic, and its tidal pressure sooner or later saps

and mines every opposing wall. It is idle and it is also deadly for any institution in a changing world to proclaim itself "unchanging" *semper eadem*. So is ignorance. On the forehead of stupidity it is likewise written *ne varietur*.

The doctrine of fatalism is vividly stated by Jesus in some of his parables, and in order to appreciate the realism of the presentation it is necessary to quote those parables in full. There is, for example, the parable of the Sower. "Behold, a sower went forth to sow. And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up because they had no deepness of earth : and when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them. But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, and some sixtyfold and some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." This parable enshrines in the language of poetry the whole doctrine of fate. Seeds can grow only where they are sown. They are not given a chance of choosing the soil. So that the story contains the scientific truth that each seed, that is to say each individual

human being, is the effect of causes beyond his control. Some of the seeds have the good fortune to be cast on the best kind of ground. The successes are congratulated, but condemnation is passed on the blighted vegetation which follows in the Sower's wake. Another parable with the same imagery is even more instructive because it involves the theory of heredity. "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants came, and said to him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? From whence, then, hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather the tares ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together till the harvest, and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." This picturesque allegory implies the problem of heredity, and especially the problem of an heredity that is disastrous. If you are a tare, and if soil is provided for your roots,

what can you do but grow? It is useless to reply that the individual has no right to be a tare. He came from a family of tares as a wolf comes from wolves. It is a question of the fatality of ancestry. But in the parable, as, indeed, in life itself, vengeance falls not on the source of the evil but on its involuntary vehicle. The "tare" was all unconscious of the experience which was being prepared for it and from which nothing could have saved it. But among the thinkers of ancient Greece the analysis of the problems of life and conduct was more searching and more just. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered~~of~~ every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to the shore, and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire. There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." The parable means that there are good fish and bad fish in the ocean of life from the very beginning and that the drag-net is in readiness. But if this is not fatalism, what is it? It is fatalism with its Oriental tinge, because in the East emphasis has always been laid rather on the passivity of human beings in the clutch of fate. But this is not the whole truth,

and it involves not only an incomplete but a misleading theory of fatalistic action.

There is a contribution by the individual to the forces at play all around him. Even a rabbit changes the face of the landscape by burrowing. Every individual in every species is likewise an expression of inherited energy. Human beings become fatal forces when they bring into action the instincts and the faculties which their parents bequeathed to them, and which may be further developed by contact with life. Our nervous equipment, the impulse to resist what foils us—an impulse which we share with almost every creature—the obscure hunger of an organism which has come down to us through millions of ancestors, dim racial memories from the midnight of ages—all these are likewise factors which influence positively or negatively the course of events both in nature and human society. If we may use once more the word hunger to denote the massed demands of the whole organism we might consider the “will” as the spear-head of its accumulated energies, whether those energies belong to a man, or a lion, or a dog, or a donkey. Probably no one who has ever had business with a donkey will deny that that little animal displays remarkable will power. And no doubt the donkey is a firm believer in the doctrine of free will. At least it believes in the

freedom of its own will, and that, too, is what appears to satisfy the average human being.

Fate, then, could be the sole reliable fortune-teller if it would only be persuaded to open its mouth. But whether we recognize the fact or not, the belief in Necessity is at the background of all human thinking both in the West as well as in the East. As we have already noticed it lies embedded in every religion. Christian resignation to the divine will is only a disguised and pious form of fatalism, and is quite meaningless apart from fatalistic implications. The attempt to reconcile free will and foreknowledge has always ended in a fiasco. Fatalism is the most steadying of all convictions, as those who took part in the Great War may have noticed. It became widespread in all the armies, and when a mate fell in the British trenches the remark was, "His number was up." The line of Shirley—"There is no armour against fate"—once more lays too great stress on the compulsion which comes from without, and implies that the doctrine means absolute passivity. But the contrary is true. There is also a compulsion from within. The reaction of the individual is also an expression and manifestation of the inevitable, so that the fatalist does not sit with folded hands awaiting his fate. He is himself a part of the fatality, and it is for that

reason alone that he is able to act. That this statement is not a mere idle juggle of words may be proved by reminding ourselves that the doctrine of Inshallah, so far from being a doctrine of despair, has given rise to fierce energies. Some of the best fighters have been fatalists, and they continued to fight even although they believed that one way or the other the issue was inevitable. The massed wills of mankind are also a form of "necessity." They react against nature and, within limits, can change the face of the world. Because we are conscious not only of effort but of accomplishment we have the illusion of freedom, and some people not capable of very deep contemplation imagine that it is absolute freedom. Doubtless the beaver too has the feeling of being a perfectly free agent when he saws off the branches of trees and builds his dam with them in the river bed. So probably has the lion when he ranges the forest unchallenged or plunges his incisors into his victim's flesh. But if human beings were the lords and owners of their destiny they should have no reason to dislike anything. There could be no complaints, because each individual could alter everything to suit his own whims. In such a world the chaos would be complete. As we have seen, human energy can collaborate with Nature. We can not only bridge a river

but change its course. We can convert marsh land into dry soil, and we can abolish the jungle. But all our adjustments must be themselves adjusted to the main lines of force which we find already in existence. After all, we are impounded in the earth like a herd shut up in a pen. Aviation is the only effort hitherto made to escape from the great ring fence of natural boundaries, but the aeroplane must remain within the gaseous envelope which surrounds the globe. Otherwise when the aviator's supply of oxygen is exhausted he would die of asphyxiation. He must turn back if the weather becomes too dangerous, and the slightest error of manœuvre or defect in machinery may mean catastrophe. Ultimately, therefore, compulsion or necessity always comes from the side of nature. The freedom of a tethered animal may be measured by the length of its tether. The human tether has grown longer and longer, but it is still a tether. To the limitations which surround us are added those which we find within ourselves. This is the doctrine of necessity whether we call it fatalism or determinism, and yet happiness is not only possible but everywhere visible within its boundaries. It is within the great circle of fatality that pleasure becomes as inevitable as pain. The fact that life continues means that there cannot be a perpetual surplus of



pain. Even when there is an occasional surplus the future, as we saw, invariably entices us with the hope that the arrears of pleasure may be recovered. Our problem is how to preserve and increase such freedom and happiness as we have in a scheme of existence which was not of our own choosing and which is essentially precarious. Pain, poverty, and death are felt to be the fatal trinity. The unknown and the uncertain lie not only in the infinite or the near future but perhaps in the passing hour. A king of the Belgians in the plenitude of his usefulness quits his palace in order to take climbing exercise for the purpose of keeping himself strong for the service of his people. A ledge of rock gives way and he is precipitated to his death. An event of this kind is called "the mysterious decree of Providence," or predestination, or fate, words which mean nothing at all if they do not mean that we are like helpless tenants liable to eviction at a moment's notice. Is life, then, a swindle?

There can be no doubt that life has been and must continue to be a swindle for hundreds of millions of human beings and for thousands of millions of animals. We have insisted in these pages on taking into consideration the lot of the beasts since they have played so great a part in the fortunes of the human race. If it is true that not even a sparrow

falls to the ground without a decree of Providence we should feel all the more astonished by the sufferings of the animal creation. Civilization has a background of disaster and the annihilation of types. The nameless slave masses of antiquity whose hands laid the foundations of civilized life and the nameless hordes of animals sacrificed to inexistent gods or devoured by human beings or by each other would doubtless agree that existence is a gigantic swindle. The world-drama has not been like a play in which for decency's sake the murders are committed behind the scenes. They are committed before our eyes. And in the human part of the performance the murders are spiritual as well as physical. History presents us with three great divisions of the labouring masses of mankind: in antiquity the slaves; in the medieval period the serfs; in the modern world the wage-earners. It will be admitted that without the co-operation of those masses in their respective historical eras civilized wealth could not have been created and accumulated. But in all ages the labouring horde have been shut out from wealth. They have received only what was sufficient to keep them alive, to house them and clothe them and enable them to procreate children in order that the swollen vampire of civilization may continue to swell. In an earlier chapter we said that

poverty is the prop of wealth. Without poverty or the threat of poverty civilization would perish. This is the paradox which lies at the basis of economics. But if happiness requires a certain sufficiency of worldly goods or wealth, then the vast majority of mankind must, in the present order or veiled disorder of society, remain excluded. They must remain excluded at least from the more refined forms of pleasure which are precisely the objects for which civilization has been created and elaborated. They remain gastric slaves. They can never or with only rare exceptions obtain leisure for self-culture. They have no margin of ease. How many human beings not only of the labouring class pass their entire existence in a frantic effort to make ends meet? Poverty is degrading. A lion or a tiger in its rich robes of fur is a nobler sight than a human outcast clothed in stinking rags. Life without beauty and the graces becomes an intolerable and even an ignominious thing, and to those who feel the need of such influences but cannot obtain them existence itself becomes penal servitude. We now reach the most pathetic, perhaps, of all the facts of the human scene. It is this. The pauper in utter want, the vagabond without a lair, and the trembling orphan cling to life. They cling to life either because, as we have seen, the future still acts upon them like a light retreating

as they advance towards it or because their fear of death is greater than their fear of life. After all, the surprising fact is the massive patience of humanity in surroundings which might be expected to provoke the desire for escape or revolution. There have been revolutions, but, on the whole, they have been few during all those thousands of years. There are millions of human beings whose nerves are like expectant creditors crying out for payment long overdue and never to be paid. If the sower who sows the wheat has no bread? What think you of a Christian world in which there are so many hungry mouths but in which "to keep up prices" and to "assure dividends" thousands of bushels of wheat, rice, coffee, and sugar are destroyed? "He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee! Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep!"

But there are those who have little or no part in the great dividend of food and pleasure. In Europe some seventy thousand people commit suicide every year. In England alone the annual rate rose recently to five thousand. Life must be a swindle for those who choose this emergency exit from

existence. For such people death has begun to appear as a luxury. They have become afraid of the valley of the shadow of Life! We might call suicide the result of biophobia. Since the rate is rising every year there must be some profound causes in the hurry and the hurricane of these modern days. But we do not expect any intelligent explanation of the temptation to self-destruction from bovine moralizers who do nothing but chew the cud of their own commonplaces, or from religious cheap-jacks who propose to mend your soul while you wait. We do not imagine that such people are capable of clearing the slums of human thinking. They possess neither the knowledge nor the sympathy nor the insight nor the sensibility necessary for the proper comprehension of the vast human problem. Nevertheless, we admit that we cannot look for a balanced opinion on the value of life from those who are already on the road to self-destruction or even from the professional pessimists. They have placed themselves at the neuralgic centre of human experience where thought and judgment become troubled and tortured. But there are other centres. It may seem surprising that in a world such as ours happiness and serenity actually exist, but it is true, and if we are wise we will attempt to extend their area. Those who have never known happiness

cannot impugn either its reality or its value, and the reader will remember that from our point of view the question of ultimate reality does not affect the attainment of happiness. Even the loveliest stained windows if seen from the outside are as dull as the lead which binds the glass, and we must enter the building in order to see the glow and the radiance.

Marcus Aurelius suggests that we should not allow ourselves to be alarmed and vexed by the general impression which life makes upon us. It may be, of course, that the darker thinkers possess deeper insight into the nature of things as they certainly possess deeper feeling than the average human being. Many of them have looked beyond their own woes to the woes of their fellow creatures, and this should be accounted to their honour. They have generally had the misfortune to be thin-skinned and to have more rapid reactions than the rest of us. Nature has been kinder to her moral as well as to her physical pachyderms because the thick-skinned of both those species come with greater safety through the battle. Since, however, the philosophy of despair may be only a disguised form of autobiography we require to be cautious in accepting its conclusions as universally valid. And yet although the private disillusion of Leopardi appear to have been the main cause of his theory of

human life he often analyses with remarkable objectivity the general conditions of existence. This is also true of the writer of the Book of Koheleth and the writer of the Book of Job, the two deepest minds in the Bible and the only two who come really close to the difficult problem of man. They examine the human lot in its universal aspect as well as their own particular experience before they pronounce the world to be a scene of suffering and vanity. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh up like a flower, and is cut down. He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not" (Job). There can be no doubt that the author identifies himself with the protagonist of the great poem. "Therefore I hated life, because the work wrought under the sun is grievous to me, for all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Ecclesiastes). Both writers were obviously free-thinkers, and they were certainly pessimists. But pessimism must explain the meaning of humour and laughter, for as long as life seems amusing even during brief intervals it cannot be felt to be wholly evil. We observe that the higher the scale of being the higher the temperature. Cold-blooded creatures are at the lowest end of the scale, and probably suffer least. And yet a fish dragged by a hook out of its own medium dies of asphyxiation in obvious agony. Increase of bodily

heat, however, seems to involve increase of sensitiveness and irritability until we reach the furnace temperature of genius. Not all pessimists have been men of genius, but many men of genius have been pessimists. In life as in geography, and, we may add, as in literature, there are three zones—the frigid, the temperate, and the torrid. Great work may be accomplished in all three, but there is generally something of the intellectual tropics in the man of imaginative genius. Something restless, too, as if he suffered periodically from a magnetic storm. The opposition between passion and reason is erroneously believed to be absolute, whereas the truth is that in all the higher kinds of human activity they are united. If we could apply to the ordinary duties of life half the passion which we waste in anger and in pleasure the value of human existence could be greatly heightened, and we might all share in a form of genius. Owing, however, to the intensity of his feeling, the man of genius properly so called, easily gladdened and easily saddened, is for that reason perhaps an unsure guide. His sorrow and his joy are generally both overloaded. His attention is arrested at every point where he sees life quivering. He is like a stringed instrument which spontaneously repeats in sympathy the same note which is being sounded on another instrument near it. Only a man



like Shakespeare, for instance, with a brain beating like a heart, would stop to consider the case of "the poor wren, most diminutive of birds, fighting," as he says, "for her young ones in the nest against the owl." Who, among ordinary human beings, cares for the plight of the wren? Shakespeare frequently took refuge in comedy, for life is Janus-faced for the highest imaginations. But when he applied himself to the study of the mortal tumult and mortal illusion his utterance was, as we might have expected, unfettered and startling.

"But whate'er I be,  
Nor I nor any man that but man is,  
With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased  
With being nothing."

*Richard II*, V. 5.

"Reason thus with life :  
If I do lose thee I do lose a thing  
That none but fools would keep."

*Measure for Measure*, III. 1.

"It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury  
Signifying nothing."

*Macbeth*, V. 5.

"We eat all creatures to eat us, and we  
eat ourselves for maggots. . . . That's the end."

*Hamlet*, IV. 3.

And then, after the wonderful picture of the "shining morning face" of life, there comes the terrible

portrait of old age—"Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything." There can be little doubt also that in *Timon of Athens*, with its fierce diatribe against the world, Timon is Shakespeare, and that while he was writing that play Shakespeare was suffering from an attack of biophobia.

If we now turn to minds of a different order we shall often discover strange, savage comment on human experience, often, however, relieved by humour. For instance, Socrates—and perhaps it was his last joke—gave orders that after his death a sacrifice on his behalf was to be offered to Asclepius, the god of healing, because that god had delivered him from life as from a disease. Schopenhauer said that if we knocked at the graves, and asked the dead if they would like to come back, they would all shake their heads. Even Immanuel Kant doubted whether any human beings would agree to repeat their experience of life exactly as they had known it. One of the last entries in the diary of Gladstone is a reference to "the terrible woes of this darkened world." What is perhaps more remarkable is that men greatly favoured by fortune declare that they would be unwilling to take the risk a second time. Even a late Lord Chancellor says in his autobiography, "I would not if I could take the chance of living life over again." He adds that one of his

friends, a distinguished statesman and successful man of the world, expressed the same view owing to the fear that fortune might play him false. Now, if such are the judgments on the hazards of living expressed by those who were greatly fortunate, we wonder what sort of thoughts pass through the minds of that vast majority who become familiar with disillusion and disaster over and over again between the granting of their birth certificate and their death certificate. There can be little doubt that at least for many human beings life is a dissecting table on which they find themselves being slowly vivisected. Byron said that he had never known half an hour's happiness, but both his temperature and his temperament—they generally go together—may have made him exaggerate. It is more surprising that Anatole France, who had a far cooler temperament than Byron, and who won fame and success rapidly, declared that no one was ever so wretched as he was: "On me croit heureux. Je ne l'ai jamais été, un jour, une heure." Liszt at the height of his reputation said that he sincerely envied his coachman. The schedule of the disillusioned might be indefinitely extended. Obviously the world must be a place of disappointment for those who expected to see posted on its entrance gate, "No Admittance except on Pleasure." But even those for whom life

is something more than panem et *cinemas* <sup>1</sup> often look askance at it. They find it a tedious task to have to construe the confused syntax of existence. In contact with life sometimes the finest nerves shrivel like the wings of a butterfly touched by sulphuric acid. Even Shakespeare in a purely personal utterance expressed a desire for "restful death." Montaigne said that the finest death, *la plus belle mort*, is the "most voluntary," and the greatest of modern philosophers wrote in defence of suicide. These are startling conclusions to be reached after thousands of years of the laborious building up of the fabric of civilized life. At this point we are out of hearing of the piercing cry of Iphigeneia on the way to be sacrificed, wailing that she must no longer behold "the sweet light," and calling out that death being annihilation, those who desire it are mad. And yet the forces of life may be too strong in their pressure even for brave men like Cato and Clive, who both destroyed themselves. In his youth Napoleon was likewise tempted, and in April, 1814, he took poison at Fontainebleau.

Frederick the Great always carried a flask of poison during his campaigns in case he might fall into the hands of the enemy. What is this fear of life which may sometimes shake even the strongest wills? In

<sup>1</sup> Cinemas appear to have taken the place of Circenses.

innumerable cases it is not the result of satiety or of riotous living or of too deep drinking at those wells of pleasure which are sometimes poisoned. Cato was a stern Stoic, Clive a great patriot. If it be said that only unflagging devotion to duty preserves human beings from such dangerous inclinations it is not true. Continuous work caused brain disease in Castlereagh, and he too destroyed himself. We repeat that the master key to happiness is moderation. It may be that the modern world suffers from too little sleep. In antiquity human beings rose with the sun and went to bed with it. Now by means of artificial light we increase the artificial character of our mode of living with disastrous results for the nervous system. No doubt there were water clocks in the ancient world, but perhaps mankind lost part of their chance of happiness when sundials went out of use. After all, there is nothing to distinguish the unfortunate from the fortunate during at least half of their lives—that is, when they are asleep. The most unreasonable condemnation of existence is perhaps made by those who say that if we have only one life it is not worth living and has no meaning. We might as well say that a month's holiday is worthless and has no meaning because on the last day of the month the holiday must come to an end. The sensible reply is, of course, that if we

have only one life it is all the more reason that we should make it as rich and full as possible. Pleasure is often more keen when we are aware of its brevity. And happiness is not like a commodity that can be measured and weighed. The experience of a single hour might be greater in value than the experience of a hundred years. For happiness is too subtle to be put into scales. It is—if we might venture on a paradox—weighted with imponderabilia.

We may now return to our starting-point. We have attempted to link up the individual alive to-day with the vast life process which stretches behind him and far beyond the prehistoric period into the darkness of the beginnings. For we cannot pretend to be able to understand anything either about himself or about his world unless we know something of the cosmos-chaos out of which they both came. The vices and the virtues of human beings and their institutions become more intelligible after we have looked into the pit out of which humanity has dugged itself. And history is the great inspection pit for an examination of the social machinery which mankind have scrapped. We saw that human wills form part of the creative as well as of the destructive mechanism at work in the portentous Life Factory of nature, which has no closing hours and whose time-table is eternity.

We found that civilization is a coalition of appetites as well as of hypocrisies, and that hypocrisy and fraud are the human equivalents of the ruse and stratagem required in nature for the struggle of life. We noticed that hunger assumes psychic forms, and that just like physical hunger it creates its own predatory impulses of a psychic kind. Hence the inevitable confusion of the human world. The element of ferocity passed from nature into the human sphere to be, indeed, more or less tamed but never really expelled. We have been in search of a naturalistic interpretation of experience, but if these are some of the fundamental facts we should not be surprised to find that our world must always be a disturbed and uncertain scene. Therefore, material for a pessimistic theory can never be lacking, and will be available according to the degree in which a thinker allows himself to be intimidated by the disruptive and the dissonant forces. We also encountered the paradox that the evil which pessimist and moralist alike deplore is fertile both in moral and economic results, that in the existing confusion poverty must continue in order that wealth may be created and that the world must remain bad if goodness is to have any meaning. Such a dilemma appears to rob human existence of rationality. In its moral aspect it already troubled

Saint Paul, who rather boggled over it in a pathetic effort at solution. There is no solution. Just as the inventor of an insecticide does not desire the death of all the insects, else his career and his income would be at an end, so, if mankind were morally cleansed, goodness and morality should lose all their significance, and in order to restore the balance we should require to begin to pray, "Lead us into temptation." An antiseptic ceases to have any value if sepsis wholly disappears. We are in a world, however, in which neither health nor goodness is ever likely to be as contagious as disease. Life is a tale that is told, and generally badly told. For all we know ours may be—we do not say that it is—the most uncomfortable of all possible planets. For here on almost any day on the seashore a thousand seagulls may be seen fighting over a few whitebait which are scarcely an inch long, while in every parish in every century a thousand human beings keep fighting over religious and political questions which will be sooner or later utterly forgotten, and which have no interest whatever for the rest of the universe. The thinker who allows himself to become too gloomy and downcast should comfort himself with the fact that all burning questions have a habit of burning out. If motley is the only wear, and if all the world is a circus and the men



and women merely clowns, then solemnity is out of place in a farce. Pessimism apparently means that if you ask for a Bath bun you are certain to receive a Bath brick. Not invariably. Besides, we may take our own precautions, and the best way to save ourselves from disenchantment is to reduce our expectations.

The situation appears to be, therefore, that as we look across the whole field of existence we find ourselves intellectually compelled to accept as inevitable what may offend our moral and æsthetic sense. It is impossible to agree with Wordsworth that "true knowledge leads to love." Sometimes it leads to fury. But at least it should lead to comprehension. The rhinoceros and the hippopotamus cannot be held responsible either for their appearance or their habits, but that is no reason why we should make companions of them or have them in our gardens. In the same way we may be able to explain the repulsiveness of a human being either by heredity or education or by his inability to alter his character, but that, again, is no reason why we should be expected to ask him to dinner. Since we are impressionable beings no one has the right to prevent us giving expression to our likes and dislikes, and feeling has reasons of its own of which the reason knows nothing. Pessimism, therefore, is a private

affair. But if the despairing thinker begins to universalize his judgments he should be reminded that he is making pretensions to infinite knowledge. Other people have had an experience different from his and perhaps wholly contradicting it. Besides, sorrow may be only human. Equilibrium and equanimity are rather rare, but they may exist in some other universe. Whatever happens, the wisest advice is the commonest—"Make the best of it." No one would accept the advice—"Make the worst of it." No one would convert an easy into an uneasy chair.

We arrive at our final question, which has to do with the problem of fear. There are moments when every living thing has a sudden feeling of the precariousness of life. Once more we mention the animals because they share with us the great commonwealth of being, and they are as concerned about their own preservation as we are about ours. Some of the world's deepest minds have meditated on the menace which hovers above all sentient things. There is the inexorable law of departure and vanishing. The generations rise and fall like waves of dust. The rapid passing of the glamour of youth, the shock of the scythe on living grass, "the setting sun and music at the close," remind us of the pathos of all that is short-lived and transitory. We stand

between the two poles of fear—the fear of life and the fear of death. In the eyes and the demeanour of helpless beasts we see traces of the same disquiet which often fills ourselves. What bewilders the mind and strains it is not certainty so much as uncertainty. What sometimes tranquillizes it is, strangely enough, the acceptance of fatality. During the weeks which preceded their appearance on the scaffold, Charles the First and Louis the Sixteenth betrayed nervousness and agitation, the effect of a continual balancing between fear and hope. But when they were at last face to face with fate they became calm. It appears incredible to us that ancient peoples believed that Fear was a Power outside themselves whom it was necessary to implore and appease. They raised altars to Fear as if it were a malign divinity. It was on the altar of Fear that Alexander the Great made the last sacrifice before engaging the battle of Gaugamela, popularly named Arbela, which saved Europe finally from the Persians. We now know that fear comes from within. It is always heightened by the imagination, and is, indeed, its offspring. If we place on the ground a plank more than sufficiently broad for a human being to walk on, no one would hesitate to pass along it. But if we fixed the same plank between the two spires of a cathedral not even an

acrobat might venture to trust himself to it. What has happened? No change has taken place in the plank. It has not become narrower, and it is securely fastened. The change has taken place in ourselves, for the imagination has awakened the fear of danger, and now every nerve trembles and every muscle refuses to do its work. The mere thought of having to pass along the suspended plank makes us turn back affrighted. In the same manner fear often paralyses human activity in many of the ordinary undertakings of life. In its waste of energy it is as extravagant as anger, and like anger it always makes the situation worse. The truth is that the forces of intimidation which assail us from without are less dangerous than those which assail us from within. Overcome fear, and we have at least won the battle within ourselves. The outward results are of less importance. But almost every human being is haunted by apprehension of some sort; the rich, for example, in case they may become poor and the poor in case they may become poorer. The fear of illness, of disease, of criticism, of ridicule, of debt, of unpopularity, in fact the fear of all the possible forms of failure harasses the minds of millions. It is the suspicion that the maleficent may outnumber and outlast the beneficent forces which makes us restless and casts its shadow everywhere. But we

should remind ourselves that the generations which preceded us and are now all at peace had precisely the same difficulties and made precisely the same mistake. To the uncertainties of life they added, of their own accord, the uncertainties of fear. But fear is folly because it cannot alter the circumstances. Only new energy may be able to do that, but fear undermines energy. We now come to the other pole of fear. During a voyage, and especially in the night or in fog, the thought occurs to many a passenger—"We might founder?" But sooner or later all ships founder or are broken up, and the time comes when the ship of life too is ripe for sinking. One of the great errors of Christian education consists in the prominence and the importance it assigns to the problem of dying. But it is the problem of living that is both more important and more difficult. Death is nothing but the cessation of function. The fact that we shall not be alive a hundred years hence should not trouble us any more than the fact that we were not alive a hundred years ago. What we may reasonably fear is not death but the manner of it. We should contrive to make it as sudden and as luxurious as possible, and if it lingers we should, knowing it to be inevitable, accelerate it. In themselves the last sensations are probably as pleasant as those which attend the beginnings of

sleep. It is a mistake to believe that death is the last enemy. On the contrary, death may be the last friend, and perhaps the best of all, because we never know from how many evils it delivers us. It is the final anæsthetic.

















